Workers Out of Control

RECUPERATIONS, REVERBERATIONS AND COMMUNALISM FROM ARGENTINA TO GREECE

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And Polo said: "The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space".

Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities (1972)

There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in.

Leonard Cohen – Anthem (1992)

María no tiene tiempo
De alzar los ojos
María de alzar los ojos
Rotos de sueño
María rotos de sueño
De andar sufriendo,
María de andar sufriendo
Sólo trabaja
María sólo trabaja, solo trabaja, sólo trabaja
María sólo trabaja
Y su trabajo es ajeno

Susana Baca – María Landó (1995)

Abstract

'Workers Out of Control' is an investigation of the emergent phenomenon of self-managed workplaces as result of socio-economic crises in Greece and Argentina. By adopting a theoretical framework built upon constructivism and praxis-driven anarchism, I could spot the lack of a comprehensive understanding of these experiences as a 'movement'. To address it, I suggested focussing on their common nature rather than sticking to the legal definition, hence investigating what *autogestión* (self-management) means for them.

I conducted a year-long field research in both countries, gathering interviews and observations with a slow ethnomethodology inspired by the principles of the Extended Case Method, yet with a 'storyteller' attitude. From this participatory investigation I could co-theorise the concepts the workers themselves prefigured through their praxes. Starting from an understanding of what *autogestión*, a political-organisational philosophy, means for them, I then concentrate on three of its major features.

Despite their distance, both Greek and Argentinian workers perform a recuperation of the organisational and political praxes from their past, together with a reclamation of the ancient cooperative spirit. Likewise, both are inspired and guided by the social movements that preceded them and became actors capable of reverberating transformation onto their communities. As a result, they can be viewed as embryos of Communalism. In other words, these workers recuperate their past, reverberate in their present and prefigure in a Communalist key. When combined, these three conceptual elements outline what I call the 'horizon of *autogestión*', the ethico-political trajectory of this movement.

The dissertation beings and ends with a reflection on why these workers can be described as 'out of control' for their capacity to be autonomous and think independently. Notwithstanding the numerous contradictions, the apparently insuperable limitations and the impressive breadth of their desires, I claim they are entitled to hope. Adopting a scholar-activists positioning, we could keep reinforcing a positive alliance and preserving their alterity also at a narrative level. This is deemed particularly important during these hard times of destructive political winds all over the world. A constructive answer to the latter could only be a common, concrete, utopian prefiguration.

List of Acronyms

15-M - Movimiento 15-M, Indignados (Spain)

BAUEN (Hotel) - Cooperativa Hotel Buenos Aires Una Empresa Nacional (WRC, Buenos Aires)

CIC – Catalan Integral Cooperative or Cooperativa Integral Catalana (Spain)

CNT - Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (Spain)

COGTAL - Cooperativa Obrera Gráfica Talleres Argentinos Limitada (Buenos Aires)

CTTP – Cooperativa de Trabajo Textiles Pigüé (Argentina)

CTU - Comités de Tierra Urbana (Venezuela)

EAM - Εθνικό Απελευθερωτικό Μέτωπο, the National Liberation Front, 1941-46 (Greece)

ERT – Empresa Recuperada por sus Trabajadores (Spanish for WRC)

EZLN - Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Mexico)

FaSinPat - Fábrica Sin Patrones, former Cerámica Zanón (WRC, Neuquén, Argentina)

GFC – Global Financial Crisis of 2008

ICH – Integral Cooperative of Heraklion (Greece)

IMF – International Monetary Fund

IMPA - Industrias Metalúrgicas y Plásticas Argentina (WRC, Buenos Aires)

INAES – Instituto Nacional de Asociativismo y Economía Social – National Institution of Associations and Social Economy (Argentina)

MNER – Movimiento Nácional de Empresas Recuperadas (Argentina)

MST - Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Brazil)

PASOK - Πανελλήνιο Σοσιαλιστικό Κίνημα, Panhellenic Socialist Movement (Greece)

PGA – People's Global Action

PT - Partido dos Trabalhadores (Brazil)

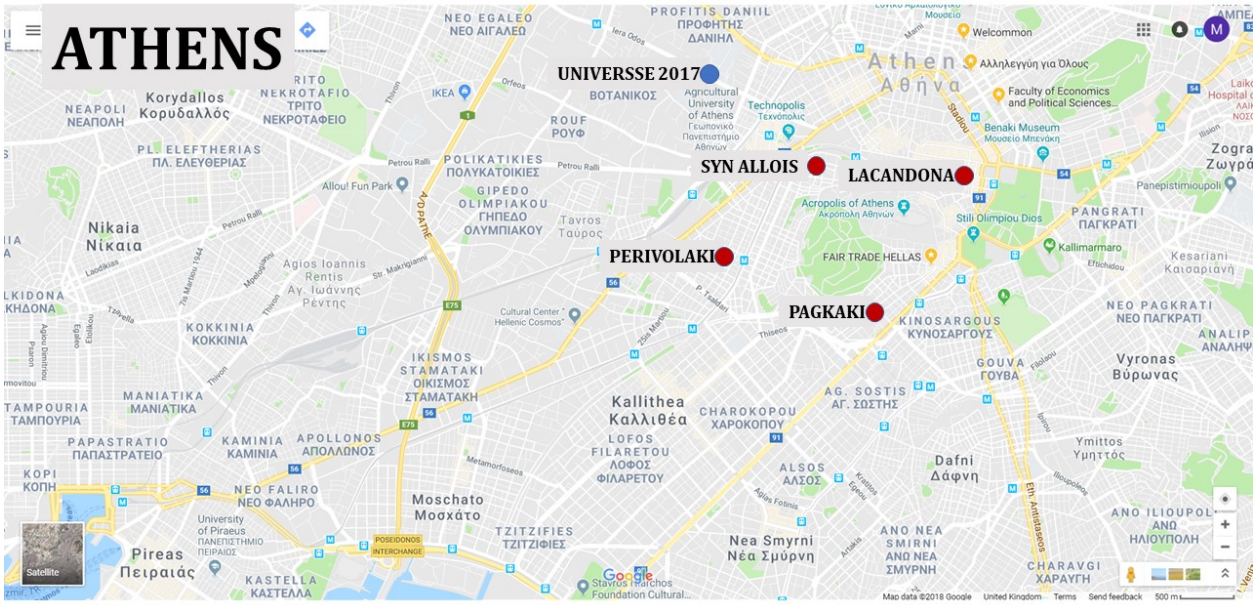
SSE – Social and Solidarity Economy

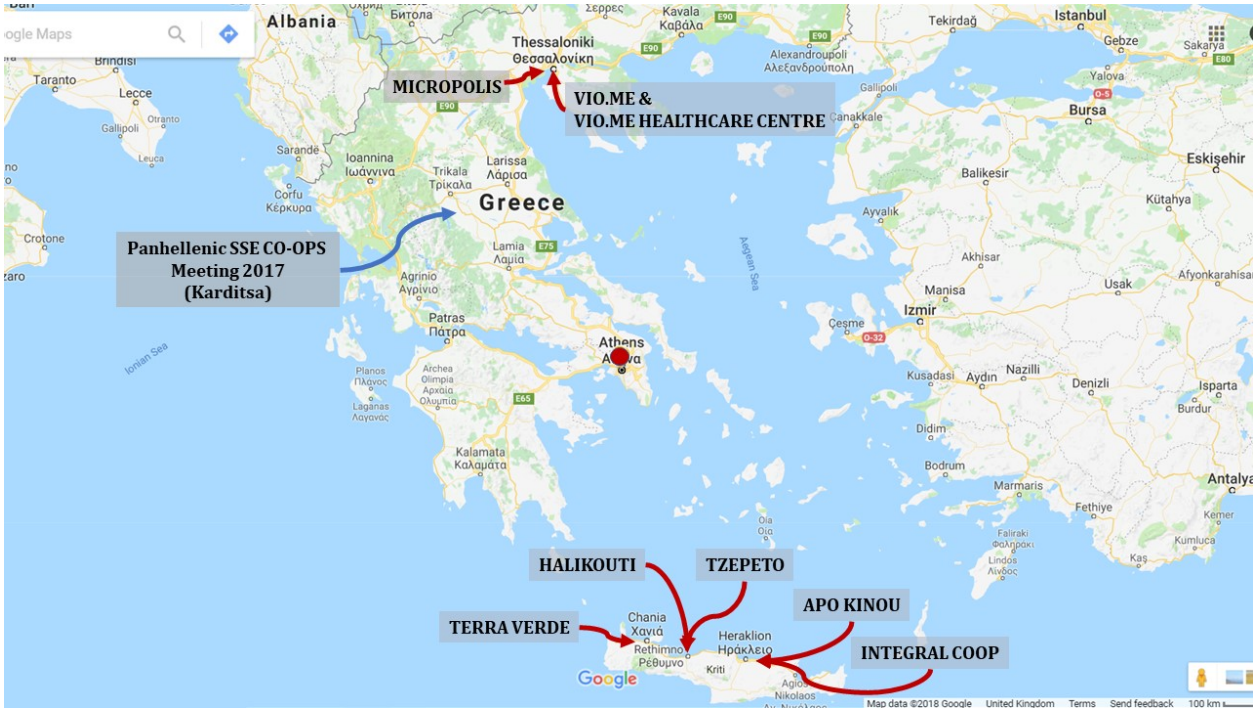
UGT – Unión General de Trabajadores (Spain)

UWOs – Unemployed Workers Organisations (Argentina)

WRC – Workers' Recuperated Company

Maps of the Workers' Collectives and Meetings






BUENOS AIRES
LA CACEROLA
Centro Cultural De La Cooperación
HOTEL B.A.U.E.N.
I.M.P.A.
FACULDAD ABIERTA
CHILAVERT
Plaza Italia
Parque Carlos Thays
Park Plaza Serrano Palermo
Cementerio de la Recoleta
RECOLETA
RETIRO
AGRONOMÍA
VILLA CRESPO
El Ateneo Grand Splendid
Galerías Pacífico
Shopping Mall
Parque Centenario
VILLA DEL PARQUE
VILLA GENERAL MITRE
Devoto Shopping
ALMAGRO
MONSERRAT
Reserva Ecológica Costanera Sur
General Hospital Hospital José María Ramos Mejía
MONTE CASTRO
CABALLITO
Casino Buenos Aires
Estación Plaza Constitución
FLORESTA
VÉLEZ SÁRSFIELD
BOEDO
ALMTE. BROWN
Private Hospital Hospital Británico
CHACABUCO PARK
FLORES
PARQUE PATRICIOS
Caminito - Barrio de La Boca
VILLA LURO
BARRACAS
PARQUE AVELLANEDA
NUEVA POMPEYA
Google
Map data ©2018 Google
United Kingdom
Terms
Send feedback
1 km


Search Google Maps
Argentina
Buenos Aires
Montevideo
La Plata
VI ENCUENTRO ECONOMIA DE LOS TRABAJADORES
CT TEXTILES PIGUÉ
Encuentro Sentimiento Latinoamericano
FRIGORIFICO INCOB
FA.SIN.PAT. ZANON
Santa Rosa
Azul
Tandil
Villa Gesell
Mar del Plata
Necochea
Bahía Blanca
Neuquen
Chillán
Los Ángeles
Temuco
Pucón
Satellite
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Terms
Send feedback
100 km

Introduction

"Remember that you are anticipating the future in the present" is the significant synthesis of Ana Dinerstein in her support statement appearing on the website of Vio Me, a 'recuperated factory' in the outskirts of Thessaloniki, Greece. Distant and different kinds of self-managed workplaces which emerged in times of austerity in Argentina and Greece, are both the objects and the subjects of this research. What they share, apart from the common experience of rebelling against the tradition of the hierarchical organisation by desiring to create a more equal and redistributive one, is their ability to anticipate, or prefigure, a different future.

Although their model of resistance comes from a long tradition of Marxists, antagonist and autonomist theories, their praxes are very much rooted in the present, and their behaviours embody the *zeitgeist* of our times. Far from being isolated, these experiences of *autogestión* (self-management) born under and because of a climate of economic and social repression, intertwine with other resisting social actors, such as neighbourhoods, movements, communities. Their common response and their strategy of resistance against the neoliberal crises and austerity are not cast in stone, nor immutable. On the contrary, they are constant movement, and they are prefiguration, so are their attempts, their forms of organisation, their ways to cope with the capitalist market.

The journey of this research started on the night of July 5, 2015. Alexis Tsipras, prime minister and leader of the anti-austerity party Syriza, had proclaimed a consultative referendum for that day. The Greek citizens were asked to vote for or against the country's fulfilment of austerity policies imposed by the so-called *troika*, composed of the European Central Bank, the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund. The image of the enormous popular movement gathering, chanting and dancing in the streets on that night was a portrait of hope. These citizens embodied the contemporary struggle between a turbo-capitalist economy, the governments succumbing to it, and the 99% of society suffering from it. Their hope slowly faded, became disillusionment and then anger when realising that, despite the result of the referendum, Tsipras had betrayed them – under the pressure of the German government – and had no intention of relieving his citizens of the burden of austerity.

I started wondering whether the kind of resistance visible at social movement level as much as the form of reorganisations workplaces of Greece began experiencing (Arampatzi 2014) had non-European origins. Following the intuition of Daniel Ozarow who titled a conference in 2016 "Last Tango in Athens", I began investigating the nature of the reconceptualisation of labour and life that invaded Argentina after the crisis of 2001. Across the literature, the experiences of social movements of Greece and Argentina were at best juxtaposed (Sitrin and Azzellini 2014), but never put in a direct relationship. The primal research gap I identified was this, then framed into a question: are the Greek workers embracing a *new* form of resistance to austerity that comes not from Europe but from the Latin American country? This research problem was then dismembered into three parts. First, understanding whether there were and are direct forms of influence, knowledge transfer, *flows* between actors belonging to the two contexts. Second, capturing the essence of what was being transferred. Third, analysing if and in which ways the Greek workers were reinterpreting this substance.

I embarked for Greece in June 2016 for the preliminary research, then in February 2017 for another four months of investigation. The more I entered the Greek environment, the more I could find marginalised actors that seemed to have embraced a form of prefiguration directly or indirectly deriving from the experience of the Argentinian's Workers' Recuperated Companies (WRCs). Yet, the rich literature on the Argentinian phenomenon[1] was seemingly unapt to study the Greek subjects: apart from one – the factory Vio Me in Thessaloniki – none of the other subjects I encountered was classifiable as a 'recuperated company' in every respect.

I found that across literature Vio Me was often quoted alongside other European recuperated factories such as FraLib in France and Rimaflow in Italy as 'solitary examples' of a phenomenon that was somehow comparable to the Argentinian movement of WRCs (Ness and Azzellini 2011). Rather than sticking to this strict understanding, I opted to expand it given that what I could see amid Greek co-ops, cafeterias and 'regular' businesses was a direct, clear, and unmistakable application of the similar *ethical* principles driving these Argentinian occupied workplaces. To what extent,

[1] For instance, all the outstanding releases – books and reports – of the Open Program of the University of Buenos Aires, analysing in depth the path of the WRCs in Argentina, Latin America and beyond.

then, could all these allegedly dissimilar actors have been considered, and thus studied, as a *movement*? Understanding this became my foremost theoretical proposal.

Going to Argentina for the second part of my fieldwork in August 2017 I found an answer to this pivotal question. The VI Workers' Economy Meeting held between Buenos Aires and Pigue that year saw the participation of disparate actors from all over the world, among which Greek workers. The meeting was a crucial place for participant observation and discussions, showing the existence of a *movement*, perhaps fragmented, scattered and in evolution, but clearly with the same *ethical* orientation. On top of this, I managed to recover all the material of the 'regional' meeting of the same kind held precisely at Vio Me in October 2016. Argentinian actors of different nature – not just WRCs – had participated and had contributed to the organisation of the Greek meeting, that had strengthened the links between the two countries. Most importantly, all these actors considered themselves as belonging to the same universe.

What I understood as missing in the existing literature was hence the conceptualisation of the workers of the two countries as part of a movement of *autogestión*. The latter, I identified through the writings of Vieta (2009; 2012; 2014b), was the key element uniting and driving them despite their different legal definitions. The incomparable cultural and legislative scenarios of Greek and Argentina had led other scholars to label the two countries' experiences as unalike. Instead, I opted to trespass these strict boundaries and venture into a dual analysis of these organisations in relation to each other. Collection of grassroots analyses of workplaces in both countries (Ness and Azzellini 2011; Sitrin 2012; Merli 2017; Castronovo 2018) ultimately provided the basis for an investigation between Argentinian and Greek actors. While the research deepened, other moments of strong and direct connections between distant experiences of workplaces in the two countries emerged, reinforcing this thesis. Intending to address this research gap, I also proposed not to study the issue in terms of comparability, but rather trying to grasp the *flow* connecting them, leaving Argentinian's WRCs and reaching Greek co-ops.

In order to do so I relied substantially on the observation and the study of *praxes*. I embraced the vital and though-provoking interpretative key of open-Marxism[2], but then decided another lens was necessary to shed light on the inherent but intangible elements that I saw surfacing from these experiences. I argue that what a Marxist understanding of workplace dynamics was somewhat missing was a reading of *autogestión* as a *social* and intrinsically *libertarian* praxis.

This argument derived from the analysis of another key layer of the Greek-Argentinian relationships, or the behaviours of their social movements. Both countries saw the eruptions of apparently unmediated forms of self-organisations in the streets. Argentina witnessed the emergence of spontaneous movements of societal reconfiguration following the events of December 19 and 20, 2001. During those tumultuous days, the economic crisis reached its peak, bank accounts were frozen, and the President fled the country. The Argentinian society experienced unprecedented forms of reorganisation of life and labour, particularly in the form of neighbourhood assemblies. Ten years later, Athens and Greece would live through a worryingly similar situation. Paradoxically, the devastating impact of the economic reforms over the social fabric opened up the possibilities for experimentation in both situations.

The first theoretical dilemma to address for this matter was to deal with the common argument that these two crises are far from being analogous. What I decided to focus on was the similarity between the popular reactions and the ways in which social movements decided to organise – horizontally, without leaders, not seeking party representation. Still, the preliminary assumption I embraced considered the disasters of austerity in Greece of the same kind of the socio-economic crisis that had ravaged Argentina ten years before. Following the arguments of Greer (2014) I could affirm that the Structural Adjustment Programs, the IMF plans, the neoliberal financial impositions that were once reserved for the 'Global South' had finally reached the shores of the (former?) 'Global North'.

[2] By open-Marxism I refer to all the authors that see their contributions to the discipline rooted on Marxist conceptualisations. They do not spare criticism nor refuse to embrace other school of thoughts, and fundamentally they claim we can overcome the limits of Marxist's philosophy by adopting an 'open' and less dogmatic approach to his writings. Some of the major references of this manuscript are authors which I believe can be included in this group, such as Ana Dinerstein, Andrés Ruggeri, and Giansandro Merli, not counting the many among the workers considering themselves as fundamentally Marxist, even if, I argue, they are engaged in libertarian endeavours.

Built upon these presuppositions, I could then frame my original contribution to knowledge in this field of study. The approach I embraced, as anticipated, was that of praxis-driven anarchism, complemented with an epistemological understanding that consciously rejected ethnocentric conjectures, preferring instead to seek knowledge 'in the South', the place where this movement originated. I see praxis-driven anarchism as an 'open' lens that allows to understand *autogestión* beyond the factory wall dynamics, but rather as a socio-cultural, ethico-political phenomenon that represents itself in different forms throughout history and permeates communities, of which the workers are a vital but not secluded element.

From the Paris Commune to the Zapatistas and reaching contemporary Rojava, different forms of organisations were recognised as libertarian even within Marxist readings. Ruggeri (2014a) and other well-known scholars of factories recuperations acknowledge the attempt of these workers – especially referring to the Argentinian one – to 'recuperate' parts of these histories and movements and incorporate them in their proposals and actions. Still, the workers in *autogestión* are regularly pictured as scattered and 'recipients' of such knowledge and tactics, however limited. The lens of praxis-driven anarchism draws core elements from their common behaviours to group them and understand them as a *movement*. This allows the researcher to reason on their capacity as *creators* and *sources* of reverberations. Also, this lens breaks up with the idea that these workers' revolutions are necessarily limited, constricted, as if they were, at best, 'micro-utopias' inevitably destined for failure given that they are not aiming for power.

Benefitting from the rich and often underestimated treasure of anarchist conceptualisations, this lens was forged by Kropotkin's (2012) mutual aid – for him a driving element sustaining different activities, as much as *autogestión* for this research; refined by Grubacic's (2016) theorisations of the *immanency* of libertarian elements throughout history – with which is possible to reconstruct roots and flows connecting them *and beyond*; smoothed by Holloway's (2010) perception that these *cracks* in the capitalist fabric needs to be valued and reinforced – by which these workplaces become ruptures visible in the here and now, with a prefigurative potential worth deepening *precisely because* they do not aim for institutional power; polished by the idea that they possess emancipatory characteristics despite the environment they inhabit (bergman and Montgomery 2017) – helping us to finally dodge the Marxist critiques of inconsistency and see these workers as alterities while they still "navigate the open veins of capitalism" (Dinerstein, 2016, p.124).

'Workers Out of Control' is hence an investigation encompassing two cultural environments, distant social movements, several scattered actors, all observed for the capacity they have to embrace a common conceptualisation of self-management and prefigure societal transformation through their actions. Nevertheless, each of these actors was capable to absorb and reinterpret this message for its context, which is the element I deemed the most interesting for this study, desiring to portraying the moving horizon of *autogestión*.

The new findings and main contributions of this investigation follow three veins. The first was indicated by Merli (2017) and other scholars who noted how workers in self-management in both Greece and Argentina were capable to reinvigorate the cooperativist tradition by challenging the status quo and reconnecting it back to its moral origins. I followed this intuition to shed light on how these workers 'recuperated' partially lost skills and abilities from distant organisations and cooperatives, but showing how they reinterpreted them in a contemporary key of autonomy. The second branch considers how these subjects are both recipients and senders of emancipatory signals, that reverberate from the peasants of Brazil to the citizens of Crete and back. The anarchist lens sees what traditional Marxists cannot perceive: these soundwaves continue their journey even after social movements have vanished from the streets, they take root in these workplaces, they are constantly modified, and eventually they come back to their communities, generating societal transformation. Lastly, the third vein follows the prefiguration of these actors, to see where it leads. Dinerstein (2015) clearly indicates that prefigurative capacities are embedded within the praxes of actors seeking liberation and autonomy – as I identify these workers to be. Yet, it seems too daring trying to picture what this common prefigurative horizon is made of. Instead, I venture into the unknown to reach the liminal *ethico-political* ends inherent in the praxes of these workers, especially in relations with their communities. The picture that emerges is that of a convergence between the utopian scenario of Communalism – as imagined by Bookchin and partially realised by many societies in movement – and the contemporary horizon of *autogestión*.

Recuperations, reverberations and their prefiguration which I see as coinciding with the Communalist scenario are the three major themes emerging from this manuscript. Reverberations are the central and pivotal element. Only if considering how praxes and theories flow and cover apparently insuperable distances between unalike and marginalised actors, we can have a glimpse of the common global proposal for transformation underneath the workers' actions. The latter are

both the recipient and the generator of these reverberations, always mutating yet invariably oriented towards autonomy, resistance and prefiguration. What is hence being carried through these reverberations? I claim that both a component of their past and a vision for the future travel upon these sound waves. Recuperations consist in what they distil from the local and international political and organisational praxes of the past, consciously adapting and reapplying it today. For instance, I will mention how the abilities of the *Piqueteros* were significant to today's workers in Argentina. This lesson travelled and was progressively incorporated in the Greek experience only thanks to reverberations connecting the two movements. The future vision, instead, is the transformation they intend to provoke and see into their community, societies and, utopianly, in the world. It is, in other words, their prefiguration. I argue that even this element travels with reverberations. In the last chapter of this manuscript I will discuss where their prefiguration leads to, and I conclude that it could bring about a form of Communalism. Reverberations carry this Communalist prefiguration and contribute to make it become their common horizon. This is the reason why we can picture reverberations as ways in which anti-hegemonic prefiguration travels and multiply. Not just referring to the workers' one, but to any other past and future form of resistance, autonomy and recreation that crossed the oceans and took root elsewhere, connecting the landless peasants of Brazil to disenfranchised youth of Manhattan.

Yet, this research focuses on one peculiar kind of reverberations, namely the ones making the principles of *autogestión* flow. I argue that *autogestión* itself, being a visionary form of political-organisational struggle, has prefigurative seeds within. I will hence begin by reflecting on what *autogestión* is made of, dissecting its praxes and considering its vision. Moving then to understand how recuperations, reverberations and prefiguration in the key of Communalism contribute, once combined, to shape the 'horizon of the workers' movement in *autogestión*'. That is where distant trajectories form a clear, common, political line that becomes visible to the naked eye.

Before immersing myself into the study of self-managed workplaces and their dynamics, I engaged with the vast and multifaced literature on the topic, with an interdisciplinary slant (Newell, Wentworth, and Sebberson 2001). Analysing the scenarios of Greek and Argentina meant capturing the essence of two neoliberal crises (George 1999) and understanding how to identify those capable of resistance underneath its cloak (de Sousa Santos 2006; 2007). Likewise, I had to consider the significance of social movements in the two context (Dinerstein, 2003; Goddard 2006;

Sitrin 2012; Karamessini 2012; Arampatzi and Nicholls 2012; Rakopoulos 2014b) recognising analogies with others surged elsewhere but with comparable purposes (Zibechi, 1998; Esteva 1999; Graeber 2013). Aiming to understand the dynamics of 'radical' labour places meant confronting with the writings on critical management (Parker et al. 2014). The massive literature on labour studies was addressed from the point of view of cooperativism and associationism (Thompson 1827; De Peuter and Dyer-Witheford 2010). Official documents and statistics corroborated the preliminary analysis (Consejo Económico y Social de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires 2013). A consideration was made regarding the authors of the publications. Even in the field of social studies there is a perceptible disproportion between the quantity of writings published by men and those by women. Not to acknowledge this can result in a research that ignores or marginalises the contributions of the latter. Instead, I aimed at trying to find a new balance in this disequilibrium by substantially relying on many significant contributions of female scholars. Another optimistic attempt has been made to incorporate those publications that partially defy the strict capitalist logics of the contemporary academia, such as the ones under multiple names (Gibson-Graham) or written by collectives of intellectual workers (Colectivo Situaciones). While the literature presented below moulded the skeleton of the research, it must be highlighted how large part of the most noteworthy theoretical contributions came from the workers themselves. Andrés Ruggeri shared in many occasions the inspirational thought that reconceptualising labour also means to reconsider how we produce knowledge. In this spirit, workers, activists, and scholars were all considered entitled to contributing to this investigation.

In-depth interviews, notes of observations and other kind of first-hand collected material was gathered during a year of field research between Greece and Argentina. It must be anticipated that while for Argentina a substantial number of written sources are available – particularly on the experience of the WRCs – the same did not apply to Greece. When I began this investigation the crisis in Greece had reached its peak hence was a relatively new as a subject of study. Also, as I will later explain, while the WRCs are easily classifiable actors, Greek 'new cooperatives' – as I interpret them – are more complex to understand as belonging to the same *ethical* group. I benefitted from the works of Kokkinidis (2012), Arampatzi (2012) and Kioupkiolis (2015) to begin discovering this world, but then I relied substantially on my fieldwork, on networking, interactions and participant observation. A final consideration must necessarily be made on the selection of the interview sites,

that from a strictly numerical point of view are ten in Greece and four in Argentina. This, however, does not reflect the real nature of the study, since other workplaces – that I will mention – are included, and the participation to their meetings was of utmost importance for the outcomes of the investigation. Still, for what concerns Greece I applied a 'snowballing' technique starting from my first interlocutor, the co-op Syn Allois. Among the ones that I had the chance to know, I selected only those that seemed capable of carrying interesting emancipatory antibodies. My main exclusion criteria were that any of these experiences must have been formed as a direct result of the crisis and consciously moving against it. Apart from Vio Me and Pagkaki, I was not aware of the existence of these subjects before leaving for the fieldwork. The Argentinian environment is significantly different, since most of the WRCs and other co-ops exist since 2001. The criteria of selection were the same, yet I knew most of these actors from the literature. The choice was hence to select a major WRC, Textiles Pigue, behaving 'unconventionally', a famous yet under-studied co-op (La Cacerola), and two leading actors in the physical production and theoretical diffusion of the knowledge on the Argentinian movement (Chilavert and Facultad Abierta). I decided to stick to these four for their liminal characteristics compared to many other WRCs or cooperatives, at the same time being all of them representative of the movement I intended to study. Nonetheless, the hundreds of WRCs and thousands of workers of Argentinian's liberated enterprises enter the discourse in several occasions thanks to the rich literature on the topic and to the many occasions of encounter.

The field research did not cease in 2017, and in fact can be described as a continuum. This dissertation requires an end point, but the investigation is an ongoing process, only crystallized in these (partial and inconclusive) words. The last significant moment of data collection has been the III Euromediterranean Gathering held at the recuperated factory of RiMaflow, near Milan, Italy, in April 2019, but the examination of what I will call the 'movement of autogestión' will necessarily continue after these pages.

The following is a presentation of each chapter of this dissertation including a critical examination of pivotal bibliographic sources, a presentation of the original empirical material, and an anticipation of methodology and of the main outcomes of the research.

Chapter 1 – Theoretical Framework – is a reflection on the ontological and epistemological positioning necessary to sustain a praxis-driven anarchism approach. I identify in interpretivism and

constructivism the philosophical backbone that make my interpretation stand up. These, I believe, allow to deconstruct and reconstruct the language and the nature of work, capital, and especially power relations. I begin with a consideration of how society is a social construct (Walsh 1998) embracing a relational and immanent approach to knowledge (Motta 2011). Looking for the roots of this interpretation, I believe rediscovering the radical essence of Spinoza's philosophy is key (Wilson 1996; Negri 2004) alongside considering the extreme perspective of Feyerabend (1993). I stand in between them, aiming to build a resistant and open methodology that benefits from the deconstruction of the latter but without abandoning the milestones of the former.

Constructivism, described through the writings of Quale (2008) and Von Glasersfeld (1995), recognises the capacity of the studied subjects to be creators of knowledge as much as it sees the researcher looking for experiences and not for any sort of truth. Beyond this, I recognise the importance of non-cognitive knowledge among which 'affective politics' (Dinerstein 2015). While embracing anarchism as a tool to reconstruct theoretical categories, I nonetheless refuse the individualistic approach in favour of the radical constructivist idea that only mutual and shared understanding breeds 'knowledge'. Equipped with this, I can then propose my original interpretative key.

Anarchism, I say, defies orthodoxies and follows constructivism into a reconceptualisation of organisation, power, relationships. Moving from the seminal 'Mutual Aid' of Kropotkin (2012), I reflect on the principles of the anarchist stream as discussed by Ward (2017). Then I shift from theory to praxes, the core element of the research, considering the studies of different forms of social organisation of Grubačić (2004; 2016) and Graeber (2004). As much as for praxes, I draw libertarian interpretative elements from writings that are not necessarily classifiable anarchist as such, for instance incorporating the theorisation of *horizontalism* as in Sitrin (2014) and Dinerstein (2002), or the conceptualisation of society of Castoriadis (1991; 1997) and Dussel (2008). Nonetheless, I use Springer's (2011; 2016) interpretative key to address the 'violence of neoliberalism', which I see as the root problem common to all these experience seeking emancipation from it. The section on praxis-driven anarchism concludes by reconnecting this approach to the relativism of constructivism. While reading "Hacer Juntos(as)" (2016) I recognised the importance of considering each interpretative element "in constant tension" rather than cast

in stone. This, I believe, allowed me to seek emancipation and paint trajectories even (and without discarding) contradictions, conflicts, internal negations.

The last part of this chapter considers the perspective of de Sousa Santos (2015), particularly referring to his "epistemology of the South". The latter, I believe, is the necessary complement of praxis-driven anarchism and allows to decentre a perspective that would risk instead of becoming ethnocentric. This research considers these workers, both Greek and Argentinians, as belonging to the 'South', seen as a position of inferiority capable of developing *their own* creative resistance. Hence, analytical categories belonging to the South, to the marginals, generated by the oppressed, are the necessary filter to add on top of the anarchist understanding of their praxes.

Chapter 2 – Methodology – seeks for an adequate methodological approach, as much as a toolbox for the fieldwork, to implement a 'Southern' philosophy of constructivism and anarchism. I deem the ethnographic approach to be suit for this challenge. Participant observation is a research philosophy with a rich and complex tradition, which I consider from the perspective of Musante and DeWalt (2010). Still, my attempt was to make use of ethnographical approach in a context that is not *traditionally* considered fit for it: organisational studies in the heart of our modern society. But where other see centrality, I see marginality.

The Greeks and Argentinian workers experimenting with *autogestión* are 'made invisible', hence observation, participation and 'slow' comprehension are required to understand what they are and what they are able to create from their relegated position. The attention on the speed of the investigation derives from the proposal of Almond and Connolly (2019) suggesting a 'slow methodology' is needed to grasp 'interlockages' and defy top-down understandings of a subject, the workplace, often seen from quantitative, fast, direct lens without cultural and contextual filters. I saw the Extended Case Method (Burawoy 1998) as a source of inspiration to draw general conclusion from scattered case studies, but in the end my approach falls much closer to Motta's (2016) 'storyteller', since I moved on the field with the main aim of collecting fragments that would compose a universal narrative.

Yet, I needed some practical toolbox for my fieldwork, and I sought encouragement from how other scholars moved on the field. Particularly, the experiences of Kokkinidis (2015a) and de Castro (2015)

were significant when trying to approach actors, enter fieldworks, prepare interviews. I saw their methods as coherent with my theoretical framework.

I saved the last part of this chapter for a self-reflection: in the end, after the fieldwork, I came to realise I identified myself and I wanted others to recognise me as a scholar-militant. Hence, digging into seminal literature such as Alinsky's "Rules for Radicals" (1989)(2010), I could position myself on this matter, while demonstrating that a personal commitment on the field and to the actors does not undermine the research's results – which recalls of the relativism on the ethnographical approach and the constructivist challenge to any sort of 'truth' to be 'discovered' out there.

Chapter 3 – Subjects of the Research – begins to unfold the original empirical material I collected first-hand. While describing the main characteristics of the actors I decided to include in the analysis, I draw from the in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted on the field, from the notes on the observations, from my participation to international meetings, even from informal interactions. The interviews amount to twenty-four conducted in fourteen different workplaces across Argentina and Greece. The numbers are not equivalent since, wherever feasible, I conducted more than one single interview in most of these factories or workshops, with the purpose of avoiding considering just a voice. Moreover, among them I interviewed scholars, activists and key informants where deemed significant. Across the chapter I will present each of the actors included, starting from the 'entry point' represented by the cooperative Syn Allois in Athens, to end some 10.000km away in the Textile Factory of Pigüé, in Argentina. For each of these workplaces I explain the reasons why I included them in the analysis, and I anticipate some of their peculiar features for which they are both unique and integral parts of the movement of *autogestión.*

My aim was to understand these actors for how they moved in their contexts and cultures. I decided to immerse myself in the latter even before physically moving to Greece and Argentina. Narrative books were deemed to be a good starting point from which to explore the nature of the two societies considered. The novels of Petros Markaris (2012; 2014; 2016; 2017) describing Greece nowadays – filled with austerity, the inflow of migrants, the lack of faith in institutions, together with the (recent) past of military dictatorship and resisting partisans – added some perspective before landing in Athens. His tales rotate around the character of the commissar Kostas Charitos, moving in an exasperated, miserable yet somehow resilient and hopeful Hellenic country.

Argentina, on its side, has a vast literary treasure capable of conveying different images from the contradictions of the violent history of the country. Fundamental was a recap on the history of the Junta Militar, the Military Dictatorship of 1976-83 that made 30.000 'opposers' disappear – among whom where thousands of workers – and the resistance of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo. The Italian writer Massimo Carlotto, with his deep private involvement with Argentina, in his "Le irregolari" (Carlotto 1998) provides an autobiographical inquiry into the Argentine civil war and repression. Nevertheless, a preference, both in academic and novels, was always given to authors native to the country of study. While the Anglo-Argentinians Vieta and Dinerstein opened the doors for this investigation, novels written by aboriginals deepened the analysis of the context. Among these it is possible to list the fascinating narrations of Roberto Arlt (2000)[3] alongside internationally acclaimed authors such as Osvaldo Soriano (1987), Osvaldo Bayer (2009), and Rodolfo Walsh (2013) with his outstanding reportages from the years of the Military Dictatorship. One Uruguayan writer is compulsory reading before attempting to understand Argentina as part of the tumultuous history of Latin America, namely Eduardo Galeano (2004).

To read from 'local sources' was deemed necessary for a preliminary and deep immersion into the context, considering the utmost importance of the cultural variables for this investigation. Once in the field, another slow and consistent personal immersion allowed the researcher to 'enter' the culture studied without having been parachuted there. The outcome of this exercise might be invisible to the reader, still I believe it constitutes the backbone of the fieldwork and a fundamental part of my methodological approach. Descriptions, reconstructions and analyses of these subjects are built upon this preliminary understanding of their culture, as much as on a daily immersion on the grassroots of Athens and Buenos Aires as recommended by the 'slow methodology'.

Most of the material cited was collected first-hand and I am the only responsible, together with the workers, of the theorisations that were derived. Still, especially for the Argentinian part, I benefitted from the publications of Facultad Abierta, the Open Faculty at the University of Buenos

[3] Roberto Arlt's novels are considered outstanding paintings of the Argentinian society of the early 20th centuries by many of the participants I met. Interestingly, his dyad of novels (*Los siete locos*, *Los lanzallamas*) was represented in a theatrical piece by a self-organised performance collective in the empty spaces inside the occupied and recuperated factory of IMPA, one of the most famous Workers' Recuperated Company of Buenos Aires. I had the opportunity and the luck to attend this performance, and appreciate the symbolical importance it had for the occupied factory in relation to the Argentinian community.

Aires (2014; 2016; 2017) providing the basis to understand the trajectories of WRCs before and especially after 2001. The study of the books of the Open Faculty shed light on the peculiar route of some of the most symbolic WRCs, namely Textiles Pigüé (Ruggeri, Andrés and others 2014) Hotel B.A.U.E.N. (Ruggeri, Andrés, Alfonso, and Balaguer 2017), and Chilavert (Ruggeri, Andrés 2014b) among others. The reports of the Open Faculty on the status of the WRCs corroborated the analysis with substantial quantitative data.

For the Greek part, fundamentals were the articles of Kokkinidis (2012; 2015a; 2015b), describing in detail the experiences of workers in self-managed cooperatives in Athens (Syn Allois and Pagkaki), considering their praxes and politics as a "spaces of possibilities" in the crisis-choked Hellenic scenario. At the same time, the analyses of Kioupkiolis (2011; 2015), Daskalaki (2017), and Arampatzi (2012; 2014; 2017) introduced considerations above the mere organisational level, onto a political one. Karyotis (2015) with his personal involvement in the self-managed Greek 'resistance', bore imageries of societal transformation. All these contributed in shaping the descriptions of the singular subjects as much as understanding them as a *movement*. Before concluding the chapter, I anticipate what I identify as their common core element, beside legal definitions: *autogestión*.

Chapter 4 – Autogestión as Prefiguration – begins by examining this concept in its Spanish formulation. After having considered different conceptualisations of self-management, I decided to embrace Vieta's (2014b) proposal to use the term *autogestión*, which I see more adequate to explain what is at stake as much as it implicitly challenges 'Northern' definitions. While on the field I gathered elements that proved a common, core element was characterising each of the experiences I decided to include for their emancipatory and prefigurative potential.

The anarchist approach came to help when trying to describe it conceptually. I engaged with the historical reconstructions of Ruggeri (2009; 2014), from the Italian Book "*L'orda d'oro"* (Balestrini and Moroni 1997) and significantly from the seminal "The Anarchist Collectives" (Dolgoff 1974) to find traces of this element across history. A similar exercise was done attempting to place *autogestión* amid political theories, mixing the seminal interpretation of Proudhon (1876) with the experiential account of Azzellini and Castronovo (2016).

Once provided the necessary interpretative background, I depict *autogestión* as I could observe it from and within the layers of the workers' praxes in Greece and Argentina. From the economic point of view, I observe and discuss how *autogestión* defies crystallised categories of labour and relations by proposing an ethico-political reconceptualisation in almost every field. A parallel analysis is then conducted for the organisational level, where, I argue, *autogestión* expresses its prefigurative potential at its best. The analysis is corroborated by extracts from field interviews and observations. I conclude by recapitulating the meaning of 'prefiguration' as brilliantly explained by Dinerstein (2014) and Maecklebergh (2013). I consider how *autogestión* makes the workers deal with affective politics, freedom and creative resistance, and I propose to interpret this political form of self-management as inherently prefigurative of the (desired) society to come.

Chapter 5 – Recuperations – moves from the idea of the factory recuperation by extending this concept to describe each project of *autogestión* as a recuperation of lost abilities, tactics, politics. I argue that these actors can be defined 'new cooperatives' (Vieta 2014b) for their capacity to recuperate the original ethics of the cooperative tradition while mixing them with a contemporary approach instilled with autonomy.

The observations on the earlier stages of the cooperative history relied on the old-fashioned contributions of Thompson (1827), correlated by the contemporary perspective of Nunes (2012) and Morton (1978). The chapter has a significant historical backbone aiming to reconnect the Greek and the Argentinian practices of self-management to their local antecedents, to highlight how they are also recuperating past organisational modes and ethics.

For Greece, I substantially relied on the notable work of Nasioulas (2012) and Petropolou (2013). Ranis (2010) wrote on cooperativism as an emancipatory force across Latin America and was thus significant for the part on Argentina. Aiming to reconstruct the history of the WRCs movement I engaged with the works of Levey, Ozarow and Wylde (2014) and Ruggeri (2014a; 2015, 75-103; 2016).

The last part of this chapter considers recuperation as a fundamental but partial description of what these actors are doing. The other side of the coin is their autonomous proposal. I follow Dinerstein's considerations of the *Piqueteros* movement (2003; 2008; 2010) arguing that these can be identified as the contemporary origin of the autonomous stance these workers embody. I found elements to

reflect on the concept and the tangible manifestation of autonomy from the works of Maeckelberg (2016), and Castoriadis (1981). In conclusion, the main argument of this chapter, which is the first of the original contributions of this research, is that the workers experimenting with *autogestión* perform recuperations and reinterpret them in the key of autonomy. As such, they could potentially revitalise the cooperative tradition and steer its wheel putting it back on an ethico-political path (De Peuter and Dyer-Witheford 2010).

Chapter 6 – Reverberations - introduces a concept derived from a personal interpretation of the capacity of replication social movements have in distant environments, and eventually at workplace level. I made use of the writings of Bonefeld and Holloway (2014) and Sitrin (2012) to reach this conceptualisation. The lens of praxis-driven anarchism allows to spot these soundwaves even when the social movement which generated them left the squares. I build my argument against the static and imprecise visions of Badieu and Zizek.

Once explained what I intend for reverberations, I aimed at retracing them back across the history of libertarian 'societies in movement' (Cox, Nilsen, and Pleyers 2017). The goal was to show how this flow carrying a message of emancipation (de Sousa Santos 2007) and organisational elements for the struggle, moved from the MST to the workers of Greece, passing from the Zapatistas and Argentina, extrapolating from Della Porta (2005), Svampa (2008), Andrews (2011), Anguiano (2005), Nasioka (2014), and Zibechi (2010). Indeed, this is not a single flow but rather a wide range of trajectories that intersect and cross-cut movements and workplaces.

In the Argentinian and Greek context, three kinds of reverberations were spotted and discussed, namely the one from the social movement to the labourers; the flow connecting distant workplaces; and the magma of autogestión spilling over onto society. This chapter is a response to the research question on the apparent influence of the Argentinian self-managed workplaces onto the Greek ones. Furthermore, it considers how these originated at social movement level and examines how replications and reinterpretations worked. I extensively used first-hand collected material to illustrate these dynamics.

In conclusion, I consider the multiple trajectories and distances travelled by reverberations coming from different sources. The end point is that, in fact, these flows are cyclical.

Chapter 7 – Communalism – moves from the last of the three kind of reverberations, namely the ones from the workplace to the community, and expands on that. This analysis can be collocated at the liminal space and time of *autogestión*, since it aims at projecting the workers' prefiguration into the yet-to-be. Nevertheless, it builds on the inherent elements of societal transformation it was possible to observe and register throughout the field investigation.

Communalism is a theorisation of a post-Marxist and anarchist-influenced societal structure mainly developed by Bookchin (1982; 2007), Biehl (2012; 2015), and Ocalan (2015). While it can take the shape of a confederalism or libertarian municipalism, as happened in Rojava (Aslan 2016; Knapp and others 2016), Communalism remains an open-ended approach to societal transformation. I argue that important analogies can be observed between the theorised path of Communalism and the prefigured one of autogestión.

This argument is built on the workers' conceptualisation of their experiences as 'communities'. Analysing their words and considering how Mouffe (1991; 1992), Bauman (2007), and Block (2018) interpreted the meaning of 'community', I observed the intertwinement of the workplace with its social surroundings and analyse their common prefigurative stance and capacity. As anticipated, I suggested their horizon of possibilities might as well coincide with an open-ended form of Communalism.

Extrapolating from observations and discussions at the workers' meetings, I present how they aim and act to recompose 'multiple lonelinesses', hence proposing an 'integral approach' to contemporary problems. I argue this shows how their prefigurative actions overflow the walls of their workplaces and invade their communities. After considering how these workers refer to their processes of commoning and committing, I drew conceptual elements from the analysis of De Angelis (2017), Caffentzis and Federici (2014), and Fournier (2013) that would help me understand their configuration. Considering these elements, I theorise that libertarian municipalism might even be a scenario within their reach provided that other external factors play a supportive role. Nevertheless, I reflect on the possibilities and the constrictions preventing the 'movement of autogestión' to evolve into a form of European and Latin American communalism. The intention behind this chapter is to answer the last research question, or "what are these workers and their communities hoping to achieve?". Rather than interpreting this question in the key of

disillusionment, the answer provided is in line with the concept of the 'concrete utopias' they seem to embody so well.

Before concluding, I take a detour from this perspective aiming to deal with the 'dark side' of *autogestión*. Embracing the consideration of Demet Dinler, I open the door to the discussions on the limits, contradictions, failures and downside of these experiences and their political desires. I ask myself whether this approach risks fetishizing autogestión, and I explain why I consider de Sousa Santos' appeal to make these subjects visible, as well as Gibson-Graham suggestion to stop just talking about neoliberalism as a fundamental driving force behind this investigation, and the reasons to give prominence to *autogestión* despite its potential fallacies.

In the attempt of describing and analysing the *movement of autogestión*, in the outcomes of this investigation the two contexts of study, Greece and Argentina, progressively merge into one, while not abandoning their specificities. In 'Recuperations' they are still partially juxtaposed to present the historical reconstructions, in 'Reverberations' they are interweaving thanks to the flows I observed and describe, while in 'Communalism' they merge 'Greece' and 'Argentina' progressively disappear, and this becomes a story of their common horizon of *autogestión*.

The conclusions recap the journey of the dissertation from the original assumption where these workers were described as 'out of control'. After having dissected their political and organisational project, I can explain the reasons for this definition. Notwithstanding the numerous contradictions, the apparently insuperable limitations and the impressive breadth of their desires, they are entitled to hope. Our role, as scholars, would then be to keep reinforcing a positive alliance and preserve their alterity also at a narrative level. This is deemed particularly important during these hard times of destructive political winds all over the world. A constructive answer to the latter could only be a common, concrete, utopian prefiguration.

1. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I will present the philosophical backbone of the research as well as the interpretative lens adopted. This investigation is built upon the study of internal and external dynamics of workplaces I considered capable of behaving together anti-hegemonically. I decided to approach them from a radical, relativist and relational point of view. After all, the aim was to understand how they move and interact with one another, and the outcomes they generate with this kinesis. Ontologically, I embraced interpretivism allowing me to grasp their essence from subjectivist perspectives, while focussing on the interactions, their multiplicity, their languages. Such a positioning implicitly criticises the positivist view according to which the world is external and our goal as researchers would be to decipher a supposedly 'objective' knowledge. On the contrary, I strongly believe interpretations are necessary to capture the meaning of human interactions, refusing the notion of 'truth' as such. In this spirit, I incorporated flexible epistemological conceptualisations aiming to minimise the risk of falling into orthodoxies. As a result, the methodology was conceived around qualitative, ethnographical, contextual forms of data collection.

The theoretical framework of this research has been built starting from constructivism. In the first section I will examine how this epistemological positioning values relational knowledge, as much as proactive and purposive interactions with the world. I deemed this conceptualisation focussing on dynamics and 'interlockages' to be fit for a study of subjects that interact and reproduce in the *cracks* of the capitalist system. As I will explain, I see both the seminal contribution of Spinoza and the provocative attitude of Feyerabend as fundamental for this approach. Together, they allow the researcher to deconstruct 'reality' and adventure in a universe where power relations are invariably questioned. In such a place, there is no predominance of 'valid' knowledge, nor automatic acceptance of 'mainstream' history. Instead, emotions, preferences and beliefs can be valued, but always keeping in mind what the constructivist epistemology asks us to remember: knowledge is not an individual but a collective effort, it comes from sharing our thoughts with other people. Hence, it is the collectivity we need to study within its context. Only by doing this exercise and

comprehending the relational essence of society, we might hope to understand behaviours, praxes, prefigurations and, eventually, the others and the self.

While constructivism allows, paradoxically, to deconstruct 'given certainties', it is through a pragmatic, political and anti-hegemonic lens that I believe we might accurately comprehend what these actors are doing and wishing for. This field of study benefitted from the contributions of open-Marxist perspectives, and while I take advantage of the steps this allowed to make, I suggest praxis-driven anarchism might help us advance. Praxis-driven means that I put emphasis on the tangible outcomes of these experiences, regardless of what theorisations might have anticipated them. Yet, anarchism provides a clear, but flexible, interpretative key to grasp the libertarian essence of these praxes. In short, I wandered around looking for those behaviours, actions and results that are inherently anarchist, whether they were defined as such or not by the participants. I argue that the lens of praxis-driven anarchism, benefitting from the treasure of libertarian literature, could help us reconstruct the essence of these subjects as much as the nature of their common endeavour. Bearing this in mind, it is possible to embrace concepts such as horizontality, autonomy, affective politics. These have already been discussed and considered by scholars in other keys, yet anarchism pulls out from them the potential of freedom and the emancipatory capacity they possess when confronting power relations and hierarchies. While keeping the relativist conceptualisation always central, I will argue that praxis-driven anarchism is needed for this field of study precisely for its capacity of recognising the common liberatory horizon of these subjects. Throughout this section I will also present the main contribution from the literature and explain how I engaged them.

Lastly, I will suggest the epistemological approach and the interpretative lens might need to be polished from ethnocentric conceptualisations. Both constructivism and anarchism were largely theorised and influenced by scholars in dominant positions – white, males, from the 'Global North'. The contribution offered by marginalised actors to these theorisations has still to be properly discovered, documented, and valued. As a matter of fact, it would be interesting to expand on this in another work of investigation. Yet, for this context of study I merely acknowledged the problem and decided to add a complementary theoretical element to reinforce my framework, as much as important contributions by peripheral theorisers. The 'epistemologies of the South' recognise social movements as creators of knowledge, and valorise their contributions, especially those

minimised by Eurocentric theorisations. Furthermore, such an approach gives space to the immanent and inherent, the absent and the emergent, defying the concept of 'big revolutions' and proving the change we strive for is here and already taking place, but it needs to be recognised and reinforced. The latter, in fact, is a call for researchers to perform an active role *within* society, unblocking the crystallised self-referentiality and pushing scholars to be politically engaged. In short, the argument is that neutrality or impartiality do not exist – on the same wavelength of constructivism and anarchism –, hence it might be worth venturing into rigorous *and* committed analyses.

As we recognise the multiplicity of autonomous organisations emerging as *cracks* in the contemporary neoliberal environment (Holloway 2010), we need to adopt an epistemology and an ontology capable of comprehending the nature of these subjects, or a "form of theoretical knowledge that is relational and immanent, rather than fixed and transcendent" (Motta 2011, p.181). Motta (2016) argues that we should first learn how to *desaprender*, to unlearn. First comes a deconstruction of official and mainstream narratives, that implies to question the structure sustaining the current model of markets, labour and relations, thus any form of hierarchy. Therefore, we should deconstruct power relations. Then, a reconstruction through the lens of praxis-driven anarchism may take place.

Deconstructing Power Relations with Critical Constructivism

"Society is to be seen as socially constructed on the basis of how its members make sense of it and not as an objective reality" (Walsh 1998, p.218). According to this interpretivist positioning, our human and thus organisational environment is not given but socially constructed, which is the preliminary assumption behind this theoretical perspective. Such a statement impacts on both the methodology and the conclusions drawn from this subjectivist research into a cultural universe made of people that *see* and *do* things (Connolly 2008).

Given this ontological background, a radical form of constructivism was then chosen as a suitable key to comprehend society. Constructivism and its application in social science is relatively recent, still it represents a powerful approach for explaining how knowledge is produced (Gordon 2009). According to constructivism, knowledge and value are generated by human beings and their

relations, in a proactive and purposive interaction with the world (Morçöl 2001). The explanatory power is found in 'interlockages' between individuals, in the dynamics of social relationships (Burr 2003). Hence the meaning of human interactions is not carved in 'reality', rather it emerges from constructed frameworks, where subjectivities are central (Raskin 2008). People are not, therefore, "creatures of determinism, whether natural or cultural, but are socially constructed and constructing" (Sayer 1997, p.454).

Yet, I associated constructivism with a radical interpretation of this epistemology. Von Glasersfeld (1995) defines radical constructivism in the form of two propositions (p.51), which may be summarised as follows: 1) knowledge is not passively received, but is actively built up by the cognizing subject; 2) the function of cognition is adaptive, and serves the subject's organisation of the experiential world, not the discovery of an objective ontological reality.

Following this reasoning, and abiding by a logic of a constructivist epistemology, the subjects at the centre of the study – workers organisations in a condition of self-management – have to be seen and explained as dynamics of social relationships between individuals, thus the analysis aims at interpreting in depth their "multiplicit(ies), context, depth and local knowledge" (Ramey and Grubb 2009, p.80). Language plays a significant role in shaping praxes and theories behind and beyond the dynamics that is possible to merely observe (Motta 2015). Particular attention will be given to the conceptualisations of the actions and the theories of these subjects, without necessarily preferring the English language and always questioning the accepted definitions.

Practical reflexivity and critical theory derived from the Frankfurt school constitute another interpretative layer of the phenomenon. The stress on praxes and 'practical reflexivity' is extremely relevant to this analysis, fundamentally looking at ground-level activities leading to new knowledge formation on how to deal with labour, organisation and socialisation. The non-deterministic and anti-positivists views lead to the interpretation of workers' self-management experiences as 'cracks' in the system, not necessarily contributing to a global working class struggle, but rather engaged in a constant movement towards collective emancipation (Holloway 2010).

The focus on anti-hegemonic languages and the attention for praxes allow to understand these subjects from their marginal position, valorising their contribution and portraying their movement. Still, it can be argued they are workers embedded in labour place dynamics, and within

employment relations they could perhaps be seen as stuck in "an invisible frontier of control in a continuous process of pressure and counter pressure, conflict and accommodation, overt and tacit struggle" (Hyman 1977). Their resistance could be described as a consequence of the class struggle itself, since "the existence of a structured antagonism or a conflict of interests between labour and capital makes workers' resistance a rational action" (Atzeni 2010, p.52). Moreover, labour resistance generates, through example, social change and the progressive emancipation of societies (Silver 2003, p.4).

While recognising the importance of these contributions, here the perspective will be much more relativist and less materialistic than the one of Atzeni, Silver and Hyman. Drawing from radical constructivism and carefully analysing the spirit of these subjects' anti-hegemonic attitude in an historical key, we could deduce they are not *simply* 'working class' nor expressing 'conflict of interests', and finally they do not bring about progressive emancipation 'through example'. If anything, we could understand them as 'we' (Holloway 2010), their struggle as one against power *itself*, not merely to win over another section of society. Lastly, their reproduction does not simply happen through replication, but their prefigurative capacity is crucial. I will deal with all these aspects I here anticipated throughout the analysis. For now, it is worth noting how, as much as Marxism and the Frankfurt School constituted a robust surface for labour-related analyses to stand up until the present time, nonetheless they could risk anchoring them to the ground. Relativism, on the contrary, sets them free, and allows the researcher to grasp further meanings that were usually compressed by materialistic understandings.

For instance, the components of labour and capital, the class struggle and the repressiveness of neoliberalism are all fundamental elements, but these categories alone do not permit to see *beyond* the given (and already known), to embrace what these workers are able to construct within the interstices of our society, and to appreciate the liberatory impact they have onto their communities. On the contrary, radical constructivism allows to dismember power dynamics thanks to its focus on the collectivity, on the relational elements, on culture, context and subjectivities.

There is, as critics note, a risk of falling into ultra-relativism. Bourdieu (in Deer 2008) was rooting against this highly relativistic approach, while Quale argued that it is possible to follow the principles of constructivism without succumbing to radical relativist interpretations. Quale (2007) articulates a defence of radical constructivism from the accusations of ultra-relativism, namely:

"the charge of reality denial [...], the assertion of self-referential contradiction [...], and the accusation that the theory must lead to a position of ethical indifference" (p. 231).

One of the main critics to constructivism is that it does not accept the possibility of a reality independent from us, as subjects, and independent of all the subjects. This is only partially true, since there is, as Quale (*Ibid.*) argues, a misunderstanding about the meaning of the term 'cognitive', as in the constructivist sentence that 'is not possible to obtain cognitive knowledge of an objective reality'. By cognitive knowledge is intended a form of reasoning that builds upon an agreed set of rules and procedures (i.e. the scientific laws governing the universe) to demonstrate and communicate findings. At the same time, 'non-cognitive' deals with knowledge deriving from emotive and affective kinds of private experiences, such as beliefs, likes and dislikes (*Ibid.*).

What Quale (*Ibid.*) refuses is the 'common' preference for cognitive knowledge in research rather than non-cognitive, thus motivating the preference for a radical constructivist epistemology. Non-cognitive, he argues, can be as 'valid' as cognitive knowledge to sustain research hypotheses and findings. Non-cognitive knowledge cannot be charged of inferiority since "[...] many of our cognitive activities do in effect rest on non-cognitive basis: for instance, that a scientist chooses to work with science (i.e. cognitive knowledge) because she has a personal (non-cognitive) preference for this kind of work ..." (*Ibid.*, p. 233). The recognition of the legitimacy of non-cognitive activities in the formation of knowledge will be fundamental in the identification of 'affective politics'.

Therefore, what is the need to distinguish between cognitive and non-cognitive knowledge? Quale (*Ibid.*) argues that radical constructivism as an epistemological approach is inherently individualistic. It is the individual person who constructs their knowledge, by organising their experiences of the world; and this is done in order for them to adapt to the world, not to discover it as an ontological reality (*Ibid.*, p. 234). I argue that we must be careful when managing the concept of individually produced knowledge, since we risk falling into empty individualism that workers in self-management consider to be a product of capitalism, openly challenging the kind of relationships it creates. The constructivist position here adopted is inherently anti-dogmatic and methodologically pluralistic and considers human beings as creators and interpreters of knowledge. Yet, it recognises that since we all interact and share experiential moments, through socialisations processes and the use of a common language (Von Glasersfeld 1995) we end up

constructing mutually recognisable 'worlds'. This notion is of utmost importance, given the topic of this research and that the producers of knowledge are what I identify as 'collectivities'.

This consideration, arguably the most important, is against the accusation that since knowledge is made by individuals and not 'found' outside, radical constructivism falls into solipsism. To put it more explicitly, that everyone is free to invent her own knowledge, and that every sort of knowledge has to be considered as 'valid', implying that, for instance, "physics and astrology would [...] offer equally good descriptions of the way in which certain celestial bodies can influence conditions here on Earth" (Quale 2007, p. 239). The radical constructivist answer to this is social: even if knowledge is individual, it is however shared with other people, and through this process of experiences exchange we come to a mutual understanding and to common ontological assumptions. The solipsism fallacy is thus rejected on this basis.

Another issue constructivism must deal with when put under pressure and confronted by realists are the concepts of 'truth' and 'value'. Quale (*Ibid.*) argues that since "any piece of cognitive knowledge is (and must be) constructed by individuals, for some specific purpose and in some particular context" (p. 235) both truth and value become relativist elements, and thus make sense only relatively to the purpose and context. Many of the concepts that I will address, such as autonomy and prefiguration, find their legitimacy in the context.

One last important aspect of the theory of radical constructivism must be highlighted for the purpose of this research. While cognitive knowledge can be shared because is based on rules of reasoning, non-cognitive knowledge, that instead derives from individual experiences such as emotions, preferences and beliefs, cannot be immediately shared (*Ibid.*). We can argue that there are many ways to share non-cognitive knowledge (such as religious beliefs), nevertheless if by cognitive knowledge we refer to the 'principles and rules' of self-organisation, and if under non-cognitive knowledge we list cultural beliefs and geographically-constructed social behaviours, we will see that these latter play a crucial role in the reinterpretation of the former 'principles and rules'. The argument will be that the workers studied become 'out of control' by questioning power relations, and they do so by following a similar organisational path influenced by flows of cognitive knowledge connecting them. Yet, non-cognitive knowledge and culturally-specific behaviours are the drivers behind their reinterpretation of the – non-existent – 'model' of self-management. As

such, non-cognitive knowledge is behind any creative power disassembling 'natural' social reproduction and opening the doors of experimentation on the prefigurative horizon.

Before concluding, we should consider two seminal contributions that, I argue, reinforce this radical constructivist positioning. The first is the epistemology of Spinoza, seminal in many ways, and highly re-valued in recent times for its inherent emancipatory spirit (Negri 2004). Interestingly, his epistemological effort is seeking to obtain the true knowledge as the only way to liberate oneself from the limits and fallibility of an average human existence (Wilson 1996). This element adds the essential desire for liberation to the constructivist understanding. Moreover, Spinoza argued that the search for knowledge, rather than being an ascetic exercise, should lead one to experience the essence of all reality, thus liberating oneself from finite concerns. Here we can appreciate how much he valued a form of learning that is fundamentally without borders and *horizontal*, not above the studies objects, but at the same level of our subjects. Finally, he was convinced that only free men are kind to each other (Spinoza 2013). We should perhaps remember this last bit when considering, in the next section, how an anarchist – libertarian – lens can allow us to dig deeper into potentially emancipatory social processes and comprehend their real intentions and nature.

The other contribution I decided to incorporate into the theorical framework was that of Feyerabend. While Spinoza refers to adequate ways of knowing such varieties of knowledge, much later on, and with a strictly radical approach, Feyerabend (1993) would provocatively argue that there is no correct way or methodology to disentangle knowledge. My epistemological stance stands in between them. While mine embraces the provocation of Feyerabend to explore counter-intuitive methodologies, escaping from the cage of 'rational and efficient approaches' (*Ibid.*), nevertheless I value Spinoza's posture on the adequacy of approaching knowledge.

Still, adding the extreme perspective of Feyerabend delivers a recognition of the fact that science is essentially an anarchist endeavour, meaning that norms, laws and order have been, sooner or later, violated. Such violations, rather than breeding analytical problems, contribute to progress in science. This research, not by chance, hardly finds its precise sectorial collocation. It involves sociological reasoning, anthropological methods, notions of industrial relations, but it might also fall under the broader category of 'organisation studies', without forgetting psychology of communities that will be needed for a further understanding of the topic. In doing so, not only does it become interdisciplinary and cross-cutting, but it comes closer to a refusal of the 'separation' of

knowledges. Well defined and established sectors of study might as well be merged and mashed together, when, as in Feyerabend (*Ibid.*)(1993) this can be regarded as beneficial to both learning and diffusing knowledge.

Moreover, Feyerabend (*Ibid.*) argues that unlike children, researchers are asked to proceed by 1) identifying a problem; 2) reasoning about a solution. Another possible approach would be, instead, to behave more like children, he suggests. One could proceed by combining notions, words, situations, and play with them until a broader significance is reached, something that was initially lost somewhere. As this research proceeded, it benefitted greatly from combining, disassembling and reconstructing elements and theories. If anything, this deconstructed form of comprehension is what allows to appreciate the nature of what infiltrates the cracks of capitalism. For Feyerabend knowledge was hardly seen as a number of coherent theories pointing towards an ideal and comprehensive understanding. Instead, he says, it appears in front of our eyes as an *ocean* – with a rising tide – of *mutually incompatible alternatives* (Feyerabend 1962). This variety of opinions towards an understanding of a phenomenon is here considered crucial, rather than problematic. I argue that this positioning should allow the researcher to recognise and deconstruct hidden or explicit power and hierarchical relations hiding within ourselves.

On this matter, I should mention this research was a journey of transformation for me. In fact, I had to personally deal with a profound process of un-learning and inner reconstruction. Aiming to reach a level of 'critical intimacy' (Motta 2016) I had to self-direct most of the philosophical questions behind this research, such as: who is the actor of change? What is this actor made of? And what is the change she is trying to reach? Through what theories? As Anzaldúa (2009) writes, this means "going deep into the self and an expanding out into the world, a simultaneous recreation of the self and a reconstruction of society" (p.49).

I progressively acknowledged and embraced the idea behind co-creation, in line with the principle of socially constructed knowledge and at the basis of prefigurative epistemologies. Motta (2016) described prefigurative epistemologies as collective constructions of the world through with which we reinvent the ways in which we speak, write and theorise. Also, prefigurative epistemologies possess a pedagogical quality, yet they are not imposing an emancipatory pedagogy. On the contrary, these allow us to perform practices of (un)learning and enable "decolonising practices of transformation" (*Ibid.,* p.42). This research rotates around the powerful concept of prefiguration

that, I argue, allows to bring forward our understanding of society, as much as it is complementary to a relativist and constructivist epistemology needed to begin this journey.

Reconstructing through the Lens of Praxis-driven Anarchism

Fundamentally, radical constructivism allows to spot the subterranean but massive problematic of power relations permeating our society and the understanding we tend to have of it. Once acknowledge this, and having found a cure in relativism, we still need to pick or build an interpretative lens capable of recognising and comprehending what exists *beyond*, *against and within* power relations, or what infiltrates these cracks. The proposed interpretative stance is the one of praxis-driven anarchism. What does praxis-driven anarchism stand for? It is a synthesis of an anarchist stream of thought that goes from Kropotkin to Bookchin, but that fundamentally sees the practice as the core element of its theorisation. In other words, it considers actions, behaviours and organisations whose authors might as well not identify as libertarian but whose intention is nonetheless palpably *anarchist*. This lens allows us to accompany them throughout their reconstruction of categories of labour, relations, oppression, resistance and, eventually, communal life.

Praxis above theories is a pivotal element characterising this journey. Notably, Gramsci, in his "Prison Notebooks" (1992), hoped that the subaltern working class would come up with a 'philosophy of praxis' to contend for power. Interestingly, de Sousa Santos (2007) argues that unconventional knowledge is mainly a result of the practical process, not vice versa. By praxes we mean the organisational decisions, features and elements that tangibly impact on the everyday life of each workers' group. These are the drivers of all internal and external choices; therefore, each practice is it itself an act of conscious 'political' decision-making. Driven by its praxis, I see anarchism as an attitude: "anarchism can both float like a butterfly and sting like a bee. The reason for this multifarious character is because anarchism is not an identity but is instead something you do" (Springer 2014, p.297).

Praxis-driven anarchism benefits from Marxist and especially open-Marxist conceptualisations of capitalism and the labour place dynamics to a great extent. Yet, distancing itself from Marxism, it recognises the concept of class to have become not malleable enough to describe contemporary

subjectivities. Furthermore, praxis-driven anarchism shifts the focus from the control of the means of production to the subtraction of institutional power performed by the workers. As recalled by Grubačić (2016), Marxism focuses on how to vanquish capitalist accumulation, but anarchism centres its attention on the attempts to escape from state regulation. Lastly, it criticises the communist idealisation of a proletarian-ruled vertical structure of power. In a nutshell, embracing praxis-driven anarchism means questioning the nature of power, as in any proper libertarian tradition.

This anarchist positioning does not coincide with orthodoxy. On the one side, the focus on praxes should allow us to dodge ideological traps, on the other this interpretative key is a sum of a multiplicity of theories and methodologies aiming for a flexible, innovative, yet consistent approach to the matter of study.

The necessary starting point should be Kropotkin's conceptualisation of 'mutual aid'. Considered "the first systematic attempt to analyse cooperation and self-organization, both historically and anthropologically" (*Ibid.*, p. 7), Kropotkin challenged Darwinist theory of natural selection as a bitter 'gladiatorial evolution' of the fittest, saying that, although eagerly looking for it, he "failed to find [it]" (Kropotkin 2012, p.1).

Mutual aid, expressed in the forms of *affective politics*, *extra-local solidarity*, *conflictual mutualism* and *reverberations* is an underground river running beneath the feet of this whole manuscript. By assigning utmost importance to this concept, Kropotkin points at the disruptive function of vertical structures of power and competition, be they markets, states, or employers-employee relations. "And man is appealed to be guided in his acts, not merely by love, which is always personal, or at best tribal, but by the perception of his oneness with each human being. […] In the practice of mutual aid, which we can retrace to the earliest beginnings of evolution, we thus find the positive and undoubted origin of our ethical conceptions; and we can affirm that in the ethical progress of man, mutual support – not mutual struggle – has had the leading part" (*Ibid.,* pp.250-251).

A significant theoretical element this anarchist stream adds to the research lens is the one of inherent revolutions. By this we mean that the prefigurative processes we hope to observe are already immanent, in some form. Kropotkin (*Ibid.*) described it as the unavoidable re-emerging of mutual aid. "One can still observe practices of mutual aid and solidarity even in a community that

has been ravaged by centuries of oppressions by various states and by the economic pressures of the capitalist world-system" (p.5). "And whenever mankind had to work out a new social organization, adapted to a new phasis of development, its constructive genius always drew the elements and the inspiration for the new departure from that same ever-living tendency" (p.190).

> Kropotkin argued that in each stage of human development – from clan to family to village to town to medieval city to the early modernity of his own time – new forms of social organization and regulation arose that tended to drive people apart. Yet in each stage, mutual aid reappeared as a common way of organizing social relations from below, acting as a sort of antidote that communities used to protect themselves not just against the cruelties of nature but primarily against proto-state, then state, then capitalist forms of regulation and oppression (Grubacic and O'Hearn 2016, p.8).

We enter the anarchist stream from the *positive* aspect, hence the importance of human cooperation and the existence of alterities here and now. Still, anarchism requires reflecting on negative elements, such as the burden of the state over both. Ward (2017) proposes an answer to the fundamental question: why people accept being governed? It is not just a matter of fear: what do millions of people fear from a small gang of politicians and their mercenaries? People passively accept government because they believe in the same values as their governors. Both the top and the bottom trust the authoritarian principles, the hierarchy, the power. Yet, every historical period of our civilisation always saw the conflict between two traditions, two opposing tendencies: The Roman and the popular, the imperial and the federal, the authoritarian and the libertarian (*Ibid.*). Anarchism wishes for a society organised without the logics of power. And the anarchist proposal of defence and counterattack is often that of a direct form of democracy.

For the context of this study the relations between workers' organisations and the state are at the centre of the analysis. Yet, the goal of these actors is not directly to challenge the state, but rather to take the democratic means back into their hands. This implies embracing the revolutionary force of direct democracy. As noted by Graeber (2013) in his observation of the Occupy Wall Street movement, when people get in touch with direct democracy, they begin listening to each other seriously and start taking wise decisions without any imposition above them. This changes their perception of what they could do from a political point of view. In short, anarchism means to take the basilar principles of democracy to their logical conclusions (*Ibid.*).

Seen from this perspective, a wide range of actions of social movements such as the ones which erupted in Argentina and Greece can be interpreted as praxis-driven anarchism, for most of their praxes are inherently libertarian: "rather than looking to institutions of powers as the place of change, [they] are first looking to one another, creating horizontal relationships and together deciding the way forward" (Sitrin 2016, p. 136). As noted by Choudry and Kapoor (2010), "the voices, ideas, perspectives and theories produced by those engaged in social struggles are often ignored, rendered invisible, or overwritten with accounts by professionalized or academic experts" (p.2). This kind of knowledge is usually considered as moving 'underneath the radar', hence not able to last after the movement's dissolution. The learning process taking place in the square and the street, not rarely described as 'incidental' (Foley 1999) or driven by daily needs, is invariably judged after the movement's success in the long-term.

As social scientists, we should not place our theories above them, but rather listen to what they were able to forge, and what keeps resonating *after* and *elsewhere*. Even on a methodological level, we must 'abandon our ships' when entering the social change in progress. Sitrin (2016) makes a fascinating reflection by saying that when dealing with this prefigurative process in action, we should possibly abandon our categories of analysis, perhaps creating new theories, or even abandoning the idea of theory *as such*. This falls close to Feyerabend and his radical refusal of methodology. Once it is absorbed that the knowledge we are talking about is praxis-driven, we can begin to reason about what kind of knowledge these societal organisations are capable to produce. In doing so, the lens of praxis-driven anarchism allows us to value the anti-hegemonic re-conceptualisations, particularly those that challenge power *as such*. Horizontality, for instance, is a recurrently implemented form that breaks with hierarchies and introduces a libertarian perspective, and inside it there is no co-optation of political forces, but just 'contamination' (Graeber 2013).

> "Horizontalism begins when people begin to solve problems themselves, without turning to the institutions that caused the problems in the first place". "Today we are horizontal, first because we broke with representatives, with the old, with concepts of delegation" (extracts from interviews of Sitrin 2006, pp. 38-39)

According to several Argentinian voices involved in the process of societal reconstruction after the economic and institutional collapse, *horizontalidad* (Spanish for horizontalism) bloomed during those tumultuous days of December 2001. Horizontalism is perceived as being both a mean and an

end, which juxtaposes it to anarchist philosophies (Woodcock 2018). To reach a horizontal level of inter-action and common accomplishment a partaken emancipatory approach is essential, likewise a rejection of any 'imposed truth' should accompany the process. Initially the innovation that horizontalism brought came as a form of defence against 'the old', yet by practicing it a positive and proactive attitude invaded the concept. What does this concept represent, though? For many, a culture rather than an organisational form (Sitrin 2006). This culture rotates around a process, the one in which assemblies try to reach decisions by consensus, or – even in the occasions of voting – without repressing disagreement, but instead trying to perform a 'grounded democracy' – rooted on a territory – whose goal is to find a solution that everyone involved can feel part of. It is interesting to see how horizontalism means also to rejoice manual and intellectual work, and how this affects self-managed workers and academics in Argentina. The interpretation given to horizontalism is of a force that encompasses categories, even classes, as happens in assemblies where "housewives, students, and retired people, professionals, and *cartoneros* [cardboard collectors]" (*Ibid.*, p.60) all participate as equal, striving to reach a communication level where to empathise for each other.

With its refusal of vertical structures, with its focus on the process rather than on the end, and embodying a multiplicity of forms and reasonings, horizontalism, in the end, encompasses the levels of life from the most private – where it becomes "a sort of internal revolution" (*Ibid.*, p.53) – to the most social – where it grows into 'unity in action'. Horizontality also incorporates the original idea of (direct) democracy, that "was once a word of the people, a critical word, a revolutionary word. It has been stolen by those who would rule over the people, to add legitimacy to their rule. It is time to take it back, to restore to it its radical power" (Lummis 1996, p.15).

If we want to be able to see these movements as *actors* of change rather than *demander* of change, we must forget Tilly's interpretation of effective social movements as a "sustained, organized public effort making collective claims on target authorities" (2015, p.53). And question the more recent, and very successful, book by Srnicek and William (2015) on whose cover we find in bold characters "Demand full automation. Demand universal basic income. Demand the future" as much as their dismissal of what they downplay as 'folk politics'. These social movements, and the legacy they left in the workplace in terms of autogestión, completely overturn this logic. Rather than demanding, they do. Rather than asking, they build. In this sense they are within, against and

beyond capitalism. They navigate its 'open veins', not looking for the source, but rather for the hidden alternatives.

The living legacy they transmitted onto one another is their organisational form and anti-power or anti-representational stance. "The movements emerge from necessity, use the assembly form, and having found demands on governments to be fruitless, they turn to one another, creating horizontally and self-organizing autonomously. The participants in these movements have generally not been politically active, and most identify as neighbour, grandmother, daughter or sister. They do not organize with party or union structures and do not seek representative formations". (Sitrin, 2016, p.138). Interestingly, Hannah Arendt considered the popular assemblies characterising nearly every revolutionary upsurge – and recurrently minimised by party discipline – the "lost treasure" of the revolutionary tradition (Nisbet 1977).

Social movements shaping concrete utopias challenge the abstract nature of the exploitative factors within society. They do it in an innovative, uncharted way, exiting the logic of labour vs. capital. Holloway (2016) explains it saying that our struggle is not against capital but against abstract labour. "Our struggle is a struggle to defend our doing (power to do) against being transformed into an abstract substance that self-expands", meaning capital (Dinerstein 2016, p.56). These social movements unmasked the phantom of capital and the 'naturality' of labour, seeking to "reaffirm human life in a world ultimately dominated by a ghost" (*Ibid.*).

Dinerstein (2014) and other scholars tend to categorise these societal explosions, the creative reconstructions that follows and the praxes implemented by workers using the lens of 'open' Marxism. Such an interpretation takes the principles of Marxist theory and expands them beyond their strict boundaries to embrace these community struggles, which in turn appear as moving under 'open' Marxist principles themselves. Their openness, it is argued, can be spotted where these movements seem to follow the philosopher's principles while reinterpreting them for their context, usually ending up in breaking with the concept of power as conceptualised by Marx. Yet, power is central for their emancipatory action, and the rupture they bring about it is no less that radical.

'Open' Marxism allows a wise combination of ground-breaking philosophical understandings of the working-class behaviours with the freedom to abandon the known path and include 'alternative' or

'contemporary' interpretations of the struggle. The protagonists of the movement themselves usually make references to Marxism, but it must be noted that among the workers in self-management few are the direct connections made to a single theory, or a single author. Further, usually their praxes are described as emancipatory *regardless* of the theoretical influences that contributed in shaping them. The tangible element seems to prevail, as if no other theoretical superstructure was needed to understand their creative revolution or to circumscribe their concrete utopias.

As scholars, we should thus acknowledge and embrace that request to focus on their praxes, which, as said, invariably brings these societal organisations to question power structure and persistently to break up with them. 'Big' theories might as well stand aside if we are able to comprehend their projects with the interpretational tools provided by autogestión. But if we necessarily want to embed their actions under a broad scheme, why should this necessarily be 'open' Marxism? The anarchist tradition, in fact, seem capable of providing a framework naturally more 'open' and suitable to interpret the phenomena here studied (Grubacic and Graeber 2004). Very rarely the actors here depicted are ascribed as anarchist even by the participants themselves (with exceptions, as in the case of the Square Movement or some Greek cooperatives). If the focus is on praxes, though, it is praxes that must be understood using broad theorisations. And, considering the descriptions of these movement's actions, and for what it was possible to personally observe, theirs is probably much closer to a praxis-driven anarchism. The purpose here is not to squeeze divergent and creative experiments under the tightening arms of another overarching theorisation. On the contrary, noting how the lens of praxes-driven anarchism might be used to better analyse their actions would potentially mean to revitalise a tradition, a literature and a school of thought that for the last century has only gained further marginality.

In this spirit, we should move from the considerations on social movements to the ones on workers, the pivotal subjects of this analysis. Thus, we need an interpretative key capable of capturing at best their idiosyncrasies with institutions and capitalist markets, as much as we need to understand the kind of alterity they claim to embody. A fascinating concept to begin with could be that of Braudel's "black holes" (1984, p.40). "Braudel's "black holes" are self-organized spaces, structured outside the realm of interstate system and capitalist accumulation". "In Scott's (1990) terminology, "black holes" are a manifestation of what he calls *infrapolitics*: "an unobtrusive realm of political

struggle" that includes a "wide variety of low-profile forms of resistance that dare not speak in their own name" (p.183). "When Braudel refers to "black holes" that are "outside of world time", he refers to the ability of certain communities to withstand the processes of incorporation associated with [control] (Grubacic and O'Hearn 2016, pp.15-19).

The term *infrapolitics* can be equated to the *cracks* of Holloway (2010). Both recall of the 'sociology of absences and emergences' asking for recovering that "waste of experience" (de Sousa Santos 2015) and researching into "actually-existing social practices and institutions that have been actively made non-existent, that is to say, treated as unbelievable alternatives to the status quo" (Grubacic and O'Hearn 2016, p.3). The anarchist lens allows light to be shed on these marginalities, or "place-based politics within the cracks of global capitalist system" (*Ibid.*, p.15). Furthermore, it provides a theoretical element to address their relationship with what stands above them. "Infrapolitics describe the very process of breaking from systemic processes of state and capital. It is a process of (self)organization of relatively autonomous and only partially incorporated spaces and the subsequent antagonistic relationship between [these] spaces and the hierarchical organizations of capitalist world-economy" (*Ibid.*).

So far, making references to the different streams of the libertarian and open-Marxist literatures, we were able to reach a theoretical interpretation of what antagonistic actors should look like. The next question is: where do we find them? On this, contemporary radical writers diverge. For instance, Scott (1998) argued that these subjects exist only in geographically secluded spaces. Moreover, he added that the modern state is now capable of embedding every single diverging tendency, hence tearing hope apart. The Zapatista movement could prove that the first assumption is correct, while the second is wrong. Yet, beyond recognisable social movements, we are aiming to observe *cracks* in the everyday fabric of major and modern cities in Greece and Argentina, much less liminal than the jungle of Chiapas. A key research question, as suggested by Grubačić and O'Hearn, is "whether there are nongeographical routes of escape" (p.9). I argue that they inhabit the unseen of our own modern societies. Scott fails to recognise these experiences exist in the here and now, or to acknowledge that their tools can be different from agricultural insubordination, or to recognise their self-organisational, anti-hegemonic, attempts. Against what Scott says, the state today could perhaps control everything, but that does not mean everything is under its control. "We propose, as research hypothesis, the possibility of structural cracks in the

capitalist world-system – and in nation-states, localized states, and the interstate system – where people practice escape production, or mutual aid" (*Ibid.*, p. 12).

Another way to express this conceptualisation would be to use Wright's class theory and describe these people as entangled in *contradictory locations* regarding state and labour (Wright 2016). Contradictory locations within class relations are situations in which the studied processes do not perfectly correspond to the basic forces within the capitalist mode of production or to the petit bourgeoise in simple community production. Once we have settled these theoretical elements, we can start wondering in what sense their experience of labour, but also life, organisation, subsistence, accumulation, differs from spaces that are dominated by capital. And "what kind of bargains do [they] make with whom, and how do such bargains affect their ability to sustain political and economic autonomy" (Grubacic and O'Hearn 2016, p. 2). We are leaving Marxist grounds to enter more decisively into the anarchist stream, which implies discussing what we see when we observe their behaviours vis à vis the state.

First, we must put in relation these actors and the state. Second, we will recognise none of them is immutable or fixed. Both subjects are moving. Our self-managed workplaces can be seen as "system-evading spaces that are inseparable from the system in the sense that they represent a "dark twin" of the world-system, defined by Wallerstein as an "integrated network of economic, political and cultural processes the sum of which hold the system together" (Wallerstein 1991, p.230). Thus, their positioning is not just against the state, instead they are both *confronting* and *coexisting* with a complex integrated network of power.

This necessarily brings us to consider the issue of their autonomy as well as autonomy as a concept per se: "[Autonomy] shares many similarities with anarchism, meaning 'without government'. Together they combine to make a powerful toolkit for social and environmental justice politics (see Joll, 1980; Kumar, 1987; Bookchin, 1995; Blunt and Wills, 2000; Sheehan, 2003; Berkman, 2003)" (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006, p.732).

Pickerill and Chatterton provide the etymology of this not easily circumscribable concept: "the word 'autonomous' comes from the Greek *auto-nomos*, meaning 'self-legislation'" (*Ibid.*). In modern Greek *auto-nomos* (αὐτόνομος) could also infer to point at oneself, or even to name oneself. We could argue that rather than 'self-legislation' it could be expressed as 'self-definition'.

The latter embodies the relativist principles discussed in the epistemological approach, yet any 'self-definition' loses its value unless recognised by other self-defined actors. Autonomy, in its etymology, contains the germs of socio-constructivism and the antibodies against its detractors: self-defined projects have reason to exist only contextually, where they can stand up shoulder to shoulder with their self-defined counterparts, without the risk of falling into ultra-relativism and individualism.

"Revolutions start at home, preferably in the bathroom mirror" wrote Bob Mould of the seminal band Hüsker Dü in the liner notes for the album Warehouse: Songs and Stories (1987). With this metaphor he claimed that anti-hegemonic efforts require constant exercises of self-definition: profound and private analysis of the self, adjustments in one's philosophy, self-criticism in the approach to everyday. This brings us back to that *desaprender*, the process of unlearning mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Eroding all the structures metabolised in years is far from easy, and everyone might take refuge in the old but known. "No matter how much we say we're autonomous, we suddenly and unexpectedly find ourselves in the same position of waiting for someone else to act, waiting for someone else to speak, or waiting to accept and be accepted by another" (Martin K, Asamblea Colegiales, on Sitrin 2014, p. 108).

Hence, should we focus only on those experience able to palpably demonstrate their autonomy versus the state? Gibson-Graham (2006, pp.xxx-xxxi) argue that it would be simplistic and naïve to consider any resistant practice as fully autonomous. In fact, all the autonomous workers' experiences encountered are in a process of liberating their spaces and themselves, yet they live and perform their everyday revolution within the spaces of the market, the state, the hierarchical forms of organisation. Autonomy, in this permanently contradictory condition, can be thus seen as 'anti-value-in-motion' (Dinerstein and Neary 2002, p.237). "I believe that autonomous consciousness stands precisely at the vertex of the contradiction, and this explains its radical stance against capitalism and against all of modernity" (Companeros from MTD allen, Sitrin 2014, p 109).

Following the anarchist stream, I understand autonomy as having two opposites. One is control, as in vertical power limiting the freedom of someone or something. The other is representativeness, which is a 'dilute form of control' that keeps its nature unvaried. Rancière (2014) wrote that "representation was never a system invented to compensate for the growth of populations. It is not a form in which democracy has been adapted to modern times and vast spaces. It is, by rights, an

oligarchic form, a representation of minorities who are entitled to take charge of public affairs [...]. The self-evidence by which we tend to assimilate democracy to a representative form of government resulting from an election is quite recent in history. Originally representation was the exact contrary of democracy" (p. 53).

As much as these autonomies appear incomplete yet worth investigating, we will stumble upon another recurrent element: each of these experiences invariably proceeds on a contradictory path. Yet, this is not regarded as a major problem for the anarchist understanding. This is perhaps the element that stands out above all when reflecting on the reasons why we could prefer a praxis-driven anarchist interpretation of these anti-hegemonic phenomena *beyond* a (nonetheless much-needed) Marxist reading. This anarchist layer allows us to appreciate elements that would risk, otherwise, being discarded as 'dysfunctional to the revolution'. We should not underestimate their contradictions, since for instance "[s]ome of the things they do for reasons of altruism of mutual aid may [...] strengthen aspects of community while they simultaneously cheapen the cost of reproducing labour and thus contribute positively to capitalist accumulation" (Grubacic and O'Hearn 2016, p.6). For instance, one thing these organisations fear is to become welfare-substituting projects against their will.

As expected, the larger part of their ambiguities emerges in relation to the state, the market, the "system". As anticipated above, we should move from the theoretical point that they coexist and interact with world-systemic processes. "The interesting research question is how and to what degree this interaction limits their self-activity and how these limits change over time" (*Ibid.*, p.5). When we try to answer these crucial enquiries, I claim that we must keep the focus on their prefigurative potential. By this I mean that despite their contradictory behaviours, we should become able to spot their anti-hegemonic praxes that are not visible under a conservative lens. For instance, the choice of some of them to occupy a factory can be interpreted as deprivation of private property. Providentially, we can hold on to lucid anarchist reasonings that prevent us from falling into these hegemonical traps.

Throughout the analysis of workers' self-managed experiences in Argentina and in Greece, I will try to depict their interpretations of prefigurative politics, beyond the organisational aspects of autogestión and considering their image of societal transformation. The latter is often dismissed as 'utopian', but I argue that it is rather a concrete utopia. "Unlike abstract utopias, concrete utopias

are collective struggles that sanction the anticipation of the future in the present. The concrete utopias that are emerging today are real struggles connected to peoples' everyday life. They are 'denaturalising' capitalist-colonial society as the only possible for of human society". (Dinerstein 2016, p. 50). As anticipated, I will argue that the emancipatory elements are already latent, tangible and discernible in our reality (bergman and Montgomery 2017).

Another aspect in which our analysis must stay on its interpretative libertarian route is that of *intimate* revolutions. Since the writings of Kropotkin (2012), we could find descriptions of institutional and capitalist forces as tearing apart both our identities and our relationships. "The absorption of all social functions by the state necessarily favoured the development of an unbridled, narrow-minded individualism [...]. All that a respectable citizen has to do now is to pay the poor tax and to let the starving starve" (pp. 193-194). Graeber (2013) noted that what happens when people get engaged with antisystemic movements or – in our scenario – emancipatory organisational projects is that the institutions become unable to comprehend that their political horizons broadens, and change becomes permanent. We refer to radical reconceptualisations of personal behaviour and relationships, that can be summarised under the term *affective politics*. We are back to where we started, hence mutual aid. As Ward (2017) observed, the state is not something that can be destroyed through a revolution, but instead it is a condition, a kind of relationship between human beings, a way to behave. We can only destroy it by creating other kinds of relationships and behaving differently.

A further theoretical element derived from the anarchist traditions should be kept relevant: this intends to be an open-ended analysis, and an overarching one. Firstly, it is open-ended because it considers the nature of these workers and their struggle as non-definitive, hence there is no need for absolute theories. Paraphrasing Ward (2017), there is no conclusive war. There are only a series of partisan fights on many fronts. In other words, this means to observe and discuss "the continuing existence of cracks *within* the capitalist world-economy" (Grubacic and O'Hearn 2016, p.14). Second, this study aims to be over-encompassing. There will be case-studies, multiple references to single-actor behaviours, while also analysing their discrepancies. Yet, the aim is to comprehend the 'movement of autogestión' as such. I will move along the line traced by investigations such as the one of Grubačić and O'Hearn (2016): "Numerous studies exist on each of these examples of [these] spaces and practices, but no study has brought them together in a single analysis". And I

believe this is another interpretative possibility descending from the historical and contemporary efforts of the libertarian schools.

This anarchist-influenced theoretical structure needs also to be given a chance for historical reasons: after more than a century of practicing Marxist and social democratic varieties of socialism, and after even the historians forgot anarchism as a significant stream, it showed up again as an adequate social philosophy to understand that guerrilla that we fight here and there in the world (Ward 2017).

To conclude, we should come back to that initial refusal of orthodoxy, which I argue is well sustained by the radical constructivist epistemology. María Inés Fernández Álvarez provides the necessaries antibodies to prevent ideological crystallisations, even of the very concepts we (hence the workers) have reconstructed here above. More importantly, she stands against the obsession of studying 'successful' experiences. "We have to unsettle our habitual preoccupation for the success or failure of the praxes and processes we study" (Fernández Álvarez 2015, my translation).

Then she writes in her introduction to "Hacer Juntos(as)" (2015) on how we should handle frozen concepts such as 'autogestión', 'social economy' or even 'cooperative' itself with care.
Her reflections impact on the static nature of an analysis with defined boundaries, and therefore objectifiable and eventually replicable. She reconceptualises all these notions as contingent, contradictory, fluid and partial. These categories do not define an object, rather they point towards a horizon, a project "at least conflicting, defining itself, negotiating and remaining in tension day by day" (*Ibid.*, p. 12, my translation).

This does not invalidate the reconceptualised notions, but instead reminds us that we should constantly be aware that this object of analysis is the result of everyday contingencies of grassroots practices. A constant process of discussion and re-discussion, in line with the one performed by the workers themselves during their recurrent assemblies, is much needed. The workers in self-management are a heterogeneous actor with centrifugal and centripetal internal forces, they cannot find stability but rather live their own existence for its precariousness. Without constant debate and quest for a renewed equilibrium they could not dare face external (centrifugal) forces -

market and governmental pressure - nor internal (centripetal) - pulsion towards authoritarianism or self-destruction.

And even the assembly they use as the most stable element represents nothing but one of the particles of the subject, since it comprises a complex universe of atoms - individuals with their own tensions – behaving in a universe, where other powers – market, institutional, unionist – are in action. Fernández Álvarez (2015) does not discard replicability at all. In fact, precisely by reconfiguring such attributes as partial and unstable, she points at the very process behind and beyond their creation. The fluid construction and reconstruction of praxes are the main element of study. "*Hacer politica*", to do politics, is the chemistry keeping them together and conveying forms of militancy and participation. Likewise, politics must be seen in a continuum production of the doing. "We have to put afront the time passing itself, remembering that what is created only rarely crystallises, and more often is in the process of *being*" (*Ibid.*, p.17, my translation). I see such transitory interpretation of studied phenomena as faithful to the non-deterministic and open-ended approach of anarchism.

Nevertheless, how can we "translate" from one universe (Argentina) to another (Greece) such partial, incomplete, vanishing and ultimately inconclusive worlds of praxes of autogestión? The answer lies in what we choose to focus on. Only by considering the instability of these elements as their richness, we could aim towards an analysis of the nature characterising them, and eventually a translation, never losing touch with their situated and experiential meaning. The following will be an analysis of the "experiential point of view", as Julieta Quirós (2016) says, remembering to approach the 'social' as a "living process" (*Ibid.*). Once again, for an anarchist understanding, existing in a state of contradictions does not undermine the value of the experience. Vice versa, experiencing a non-contradictory existence, 'faithful to the party line', is believed to be hilariously unrealistic.

Before moving onto the methodology, one final theoretical proposal must complete the picture. I mentioned de Sousa Santos and anticipated his contribution in framing a sociology of absences and emergences (2015). This, I believe, has reasons to be deepened. My argument is that a praxis-driven anarchist point of view allows to spot, understand, comprehend and embrace our subjects.

Yet, a significant component of this investigation was on their relations, specifically on the interconnections between Argentinian and Greek movements and workers. As such, we might need to gather theoretical energies from a conceptualisation allowing us to grasp how these flows of knowledge, solidarity and mutualism behave. To do so, I opted trying not to strictly abide by ethnocentric point of views, but rather to seek for inspiration amid the epistemological proposals coming from the "South", where these experiences belong.

Epistemologies of the South

> While movements of such rapid growth, diversity, and popularity are not unprecedented, the most significant innovation in Argentina may be that disparate groups are aware of one another, that they are interrelated, and that they can make use of (or create) many more networks of exchange and communication around the globe. Argentine movements, for example, have made significant connections to the MST in Brazil [...]. The Zapatistas have also consistently engaged in exchanges, visiting and being visited by people in other movements. [...] A number of networks, conferences, and connections between the various autonomous movements around the globe have been created over the past decade – groups and gatherings including Peoples' Global Action (PGA), the World Social Forum, Via Campesina, and Indymedia to name just a few (Sitrin 2014, p.16).

This research began with the assumption of a transfer between Argentinian praxes of self-management and Europe in turmoil for the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, especially looking at Greece as a potential receiver. The argument is then that the Argentinian movement of self-management had an *influence* – including transfer of knowledge, mutualism, solidarity, reverberation of organisational and political ideas – on the Greek scenario. The initial aim has thus been to consider how organisational forms spread through contagion. Social movements literature provides examples of the 'reverberation' of politics and practices onto other societies, as in the example above.

Yet, given there is no conclusive sociological description of contemporary movements, nor a theory explaining them adequately (Sitrin 2016), we should move onto the anthropological, in the field of ethnographic understanding, and be active and participative listeners among them, rather than theorists descending onto them. Another important concept to digest is that when dealing with social movements we should forget borders and groupings. The ones here presented can be better

described as 'societies in movement' rather than pure and simple social movements. This definition derives from Raul Zibechi's (2007) interpretation of popular movements in Bolivia, and it is deemed to fit this context for three important reasons. First, these movements *outflow* and create, they *exceed* onto society and, for the context of this study, onto the workplace, leaving a *moving legacy* that we will framed as autogestión. Secondly, their causes and effects concern society in its whole, in a post-crisis or during-crisis context, as in the case of Argentina and Greece. Instead of being geographically or class-confined, they speak to everyone and include potentially everyone, as in the famous slogan of Occupy Wall Street "We are the 99%" (Graeber 2013). The subject of these movements is clearly not just the 'working class'. Third, when referring to movement without geographical bonds, I mean these movements interact one with the other, creating a 'movement of movements' (Cox and Nilsen 2007). They 'reverberate' onto one another, as I will argue, exchanging strategies, tactics and ultimately praxes of prefigurative nature. For these reasons, when talking about social movements the reader should bear in mind that I will implicitly refer to 'societies in movement'. In the final parts of this writing, I will argue that these are composed of 'communities in movement', that carry their own antibodies of resistance and possess the quality to replicate them.

Social movements are also here understood as *creators of knowledge*. "Many powerful critiques and understandings of dominant ideologies and power structures, visions of social change and the politics of domination and resistance in general emerge from these spaces and subsequently emphasize the significance of the knowledge-production dimensions of movement activism" (Choudry and Kapoor 2010, p.1). While it is possible to infer through several analyses the ways in which the Argentinian uprising of 2001 and the Greek occupy movements ten years later are somehow related, Marina Sitrin (2014) allows us to strengthen the supposed affinity by considering her descriptions and dissection of the Argentinian society after 2001. What she portrays appears transferrable to the Greek social set-up after 2008/11.

Sitrin (2014) builds her arguments on how Argentinian society changed from the 19-20 December 2001 upon the notions that: society reorganised spontaneously and horizontally, escaping top-down and hierarchical superimpositions; that this was not unexpected but came out of immediate needs and praxes rather than politics and theories, and the breadth and the inclusivity of this phenomenon were outstanding; that this persisted and shaped the Argentinian society to come –

the organisational forms of today – thanks to support, transfer and mutual contagion with other movements such as the MST and the Zapatistas; and that this was ultimately reinforced and compacted by occasions of meetings such as the World Social Forum and other gatherings.

My standpoint is that after almost two decades, the significance of such movement of rupture and reconstruction is still tangible, but it might have risked taking the route towards a crystallization. Yet, it did not stop spreading its original form of struggle by contagion, especially in the event of the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 in Europe. When the crisis hit Greece, people began to occupy squares and streets, and to aggregate in forms of spontaneous assemblies. The birth of community projects, autonomous cooperatives and even occupations of factories across Europe and in Greece credits the popular experience of resistance and reconstruction of Argentina.

Still, these subjects need to be made visible by making them come to the surface from the layers of predominant narratives. "There is no social justice without epistemological justice" argues de Sousa Santos (on Cox, Nilsen, and Pleyers 2017, p.16). Subjects that have been 'invisibilised' and denied by dominant forms of knowledge, power relations and common narratives need to be defended at analytical level. This is one of the purposes of this research. Given that an 'ordinary' economic analysis would discard these small-scale socio-economic structures as either irrelevant, utopic, or short lived, we have the duty to analytically protect such experiences. At the same time, governments and institutions – with few exceptions – either try to absorb these experiences to make them become part of 'official policies', or repress them by violent means (evictions, etc.), legal means (tax raises, etc.), or political means (open support for the previous owner of WRCs).

There are three means by which we can provide epistemological justice, as a form of counterattack to both the repressive praxes and conformist narratives that reduce several contemporary forms of social resistance to marginality. First, we should unveil power forces and domination goals behind the curtains of the so-called 'objective knowledge' or any 'true' version of history. Such intellectual and political action goes hand in hand with a relativist and constructivist epistemology. The second operation would be, as de Sousa Santos (2012) argued, to rethink the maps of our emancipation, meaning to shed light on and analyse alternative forms of knowledge (Cox, Nilsen, and Pleyers 2017, p.11). Here the main targets are standardised and predominant languages and categories. A

praxis-driven anarchist lens equips us with the skills necessary to understand *other* forms of knowledge and language, hence challenging 'ordinary' narratives.

The third and last element that should allow us to take the path towards epistemic justice, is what drives this research towards a reconnection of distant phenomena of resistance, namely the attempt to replace dominant knowledge not by other dominant – however alternative – forms, but with co-existing and articulated formulae of counter-knowledge (*Ibid.*). Therefore, the aim of this investigation is not to reach a uniform explanation of the self-management phenomena by categorising, subtracting and compacting their features. On the contrary, the plurality of elements contributing to diversified – and thus diversely adequate – forms of self-management resistance "is seen as a direct challenge to the very idea of a single path to emancipation and happiness" (*Ibid*., p.11).

Boaventura de Sousa Santos' (2014) 'Epistemologies of the South' is pivotal for this process. One of the assumptions floating underneath this analysis is that an innovative form of labour resistance coming from the 'Global South' is spreading by contagion in the 'Global North'. Two other interpretative proposals can be made from the initial affirmation: in the first I argue that, therefore, the 'Global North' is, at its best, losing ground, if not disappearing like in Greece, Portugal, Cyprus. Proof of such statements would be the 'invasion' of policies oddly similar to Structural Adjustment Programs in the before-untouchable European space (Greer 2014). The second is that a whole layer of Northern population is falling onto 'Southern categories' of poorness, fragility, precarity and other flavours of neoliberalism. Proposals coming from the 'South' might be of interest even in the most 'Northern' places, then.

De Sousa Santos (2006) reasons about the 'South' not (just) in geographical terms, but rather as a metaphor of overturning our way of seeing and thinking, by embracing the point of view "from below, from and with the oppressed, combining practical and cognitive resistances" (Cox, Nilsen, and Pleyers 2017, p.21). The Greek citizens that courageously made the choice to organise, re-conceptualise labour, and survive out of their self-managed production, are marginalised actors: 'southern' debris of a neoliberal 'northern' Europe. In this sense they should be considered and given voice, breaking the main narrative that made them irresponsible, lazy, disobedient, hence invisible as subjects. According to Santos' sociology of absences we should "reintegrate these

actors, these alternative and these perspectives, [towards] a very different vision of the history and struggles" (Zinn 2005 on Cox, Nilsen, and Pleyers 2017, p.16).

Doing a sociology of absences means researching into existing social practices and institutions that have been actively made non-existent or treated as implausible alternatives to the status quo. Historical and contemporary existences are made absent by labelling them ignorant, backward, inferior, local (or too contextual), and unproductive (Grubacic and O'Hearn 2016, p.22). The sociology of emergences as defined by de Sousa Santos (2015) consists in constructing a future of concrete, utopian, and realist possibilities. The two sociologies go hand in hand, since the recovery of what has been made absent provides the raw materials for possible alternative futures to capitalism. "Whereas the sociology of absences amplifies the present by adding to the existing reality what was subtracted from it [...] the sociology of emergences enlarges the present by adding to the existing reality the possibilities and future expectations it contains (de Sousa Santos 2012, p.57).

Together with Holloway (2014), Santos argues that "the alternative to the dominant society will not happen after the rupture of a "big revolution" [...] but it is plural and already exists in a multiplicity of experimentations and prefigurative practices which are at once utopian and realistic" (Cox, Nilsen, and Pleyers 2017, p.17). A sociology of emergence is the consequence of such reasoning, as its task is to detect, analyse and act as a megaphone for experiences that embody "concrete alternatives to the dominant colonial and capitalist society" (*Ibid.*, p.16). Grubačić (2016) argued that "[w]hile the market economy and monopoly capital have been exhaustively researched and analysed, the lowest (and largest) sector of material life is still undertheorized, especially with respect to ground and societies that attempt to "refuse" capitalism, either completely or in certain parts of their lives" (p.2).

My approach to knowledge transfer is rooted upon the concept of a constant conversation between distant social movements. Indeed, workers' autonomous projects are rarely comparable to any social movement initiative, even when partially deriving from a social process in the streets. Nevertheless, I argue that what I call 'reverberation' of self-management took place during the last two decades of growing internationalisation of 'subaltern histories'. Here I am referring to both proactively created moments of gathering (the World Social Forum) and to indirect and direct contagion between geographically distant but ethically similar 'square movements' (No Global,

Occupy Wall Street, 15-M, Syntagma Square, etc.). Other previous moments of ruptures had the role to 'lead the way', namely: the MST in Brazil, the Zapatistas in Mexico, and the *asembleas vecinales* in Argentina in the excitingly tumultuous days of 2002.

Two concepts must be kept relevant throughout the whole analysis. The first, as already expressed, is the mixture, collapse, merging and interchange between 'South' and 'North'. "While populations of the Global South have been particularly affected by capitalism and colonialism, this "South" also exists in the North, among excluded, silenced and marginalised populations" (EZLN 1994, p.2). Written in 1994, this EZLN document could have not predicted better the current scenario, where the 'excluded, silenced and marginalized' of the 'North' have grown in numbers, became a new mass, and experience what their Southern counterparts already knew so well: the violence of neoliberalism (Springer 2016). Emulation and replication of the symbology of 'southern' liberation attempts, despite the distance or the dissimilarity, is believed to be the consequence of this process. Every single workers' cooperative in Athens, in Heraklion, in Chania and everywhere I have been during my field research in Greece has a poster or a painting on the wall, like a founding myth to constantly keep in front of their eyes. Each of them shows a Zapatista group with their headscarves and their working tools.

There is, though, another element that needs to be explained alongside the massive importance of 'southern' *cracks* in the contemporary 'northern' counter-narrative. Workers in self-management, possibly inspired by moments of direct and indirect contagion, came up with their own gatherings, their own connections, their own subaltern history. Such a choice does not spring from a need to break with social movements, World Social Forums or else. These workers feel they belong in the same vein of counter-culture, as much as they share actions and lessons learned over the last two decades. Even more, many of the self-managed workers cooperatives also belong to social and solidarity economy (SSE) and fair trade, they support and take actions to defend revolutions, they join efforts to support distant causes. Yet, they preferred to create their own space of theorisation and action, for two reasons.

They opted to re-create a direct connection with their own labour histories, something a broader forum of discussion would not be able to grant them. They also testified to a partial failure of the 'world movement' of the '00s and '10s, so inclusive yet so fragile when having to deal with institutional actors and NGOs (Hudig and Dowling 2010). The autonomous option of self-managed

workers gatherings came from Argentina and took the form of the 'Workers' Economy Gatherings, both international and 'regional'. Initially driven by the scholars of the Facultad Abierta (Open Faculty) at the University of Buenos Aires, these meetings represent a direct and focal point of interchange, elaboration and, ultimately, *reverberation* of organisational praxes of, to and for workers.

The occasion of exchange and knowledge transfer represented by these meetings is fundamental, yet it does not encompass all the ground where workers meet and exchange their praxes and politics. Direct connections between WRCs and cooperatives are also extremely relevant. For instance, the evident support manifested for the Greek Vio Me factory by the workers of FaSinPat Zanón of Argentina brought to visits, exchanges of ideas, and talks about joint logistic operations. This is one of the few examples on how self-managed workers are anything but self-marginalised and isolated. Their concept of *fabrica abierta* ("open factory") works both ways: internally, by opening the doors to anyone supporting and learning from them; externally by allowing the workers to empathetically embrace communal struggles and become part of a 'conflicting and mutualistic'[42] project of societal transformation.

In conclusion, an epistemological approach coming from the South allows us to frame the experience of these workers without necessarily falling into ethnocentrism and, especially, Eurocentrism. De Sousa Santos' philosophy opens the doors to *their* interpretations of their actions, largely taking place during the common, international meetings. The nature of such epistemological approach I here adopt is hence fundamentally an attempt to decolonise knowledge.

The View from the Tree

Throughout the theoretical chapter I engaged three branches of literature. The first considers how we approach knowledge, from which I derived, discussed and motivated my radical constructivist epistemology. The second is the rich vein of the anarchist thoughts, that helped me to frame the concept of a praxis-driven lens in libertarian sauce, as much as to prove that this is absent and needed in this field of study. The third and last branch disconnects itself from an ethnocentric tree

of knowledge by proposing, instead, to value marginal, 'southern' and often invisible theorisations. From this tree, both the sky – the utopias – and the undergrowth – the oppressed – become thus observable and comprehensible.

The original contribution this research intends to bring to the discipline is not just reflected in the outcomes of this investigation and on the multiple analysis of case-studies interactions. Instead, it also comprises these theoretical and methodological presuppositions that allowed the researcher to interpret a phenomenon in a substantially different key. As such, I deem the combination of constructivism and anarchism, complemented by the value given to non-western theorisations, to be a central innovative element for the study of self-managed workplaces.

When embracing constructivism, I proposed to follow a radical path, while taking into consideration and discussing the criticism that might surge from such a choice. Also, I incorporated some fundamental philosophical milestones from Spinoza, as much as other scholars decided to do. Nonetheless, by balancing these with the de-constructionist, antagonist and provocative approach of Feyerabend, I suggest we can shape a theoretical tool capable of capturing the 'freedoms' as much as the divergent conceptualisations of the subjects studied, even and especially when they fall outside more controlled interpretations.

By proposing to use anarchism as a main theoretical source, I imply the important foundations built upon open-Marxist conceptualisations can be valorised *and* taken forward. Benefitting from the outstanding work of other scholars in the discipline, I nonetheless propose to revaluate the libertarian tradition of thought, which I believe may shed light on narratives that might risk being bottled-up by the Marxist categorisations of class, labour and capital. Still, I made use of concepts developed by open-Marxist scholars to prove how these can be flexibly interpreted from an anarchist perspective, which sees their emancipatory potential not for the class revolution, but rather the freedom they embody. Not for their ultimate goal, but for the rupture they provoke here and now. In a nutshell, the anarchist lens values anti-power attitudes, which I believe these workers carry on. Anarchism does not descend upon them from a prophetical point of view. Instead, praxis is what drives the whole theory, generated by the actions, their behaviours, and the knowledge of the workers themselves.

Finally, I considered how all these theoretical foundations might risk of being ethnocentric. These workers, I argue, ended up belonging to the 'Global South'. If we aim to understand their capacities and desires, we might as well try to embrace a language that does not necessarily come from the 'North'. Again, the central problem is power, and how power relations risk to be interpreted. Following de Sousa Santos, I suggested a possible solution could be to embrace narratives, definitions, categorisations and interpretations conceived among the marginals, the oppressed, the invisibles. A 'southern' look can question power relations even for and within those philosophies and epistemologies presenting themselves as anti-hegemonic, such as constructivism and anarchism.

My original theoretical contribution is thus a sum of these three elements, that merge and complement each other to take us forward to the methodology. The latter is not by chance ethnographical, relativist and, in the end, is an activist endeavour for a scholarly purpose.

2. Methodology

The preliminary methodological intuition was to go upriver starting from the delta. If Greece was the new kid on the block of resistance against austerity, Argentina took the role of the inspirer. Such a schematic interpretation is obviously extremely reductionist, since influences were and are manifold. Yet, the analysis focused on the process of contagion of peculiar forms of organisation, that in their modern incarnation seemed to have blossomed in Argentina after 2001 and appeared in contemporary Greece after the financial crisis of 2008.

Nevertheless, the WRCs in Argentina are today a relatively known and established actor for this branch of study (Atzeni and Ghigliani 2007; Ruggeri and Vieta 2015; Azzellini 2016). Significantly less acknowledged are their Greek counterparts, given that national laws for expropriations are different. To begin the field research in Argentina would have meant to take for granted what was achieved – the 'model' of the WRCs – then to start wandering around Greece in a desperate attempt to find anything similar.

Choosing to initially land in Athens, and only after having considered what had occurred in Greece move upriver to the 'source', to Argentina, was in line with the rationale of this research's purpose. In fact, the goal was to look for anti-austerity organisational practices among the workers, and to see whether they had been influenced by previous comparable forms.

I spent six months in Greece – one in 2016 for the preliminary research and five in 2017 – followed by another five in Argentina. I was based in the capital cities, but I moved across the two countries to participate to meetings, reach distant workplaces, interview key actors. My main aim was to access the workplaces and *join* the movement of autogestión as activist-researcher. I entered the field with an ethnographic approach influenced by the 'slow methodology' of Almond and Connolly (2019) and guided by the principles of the Extended Case Method (1998). The two are complemented by what I will describe as a 'storyteller' positioning: a non-delimited form of anti-hegemonic ethnography imbued with scholar-activism, looking for fragments, stories and moments that could help me to compose the mosaic of autogestión.

I implied several techniques descending from this methodology, such as in-depth interviews, participant observations in the workplaces, snowballing, use of written sources in native languages (even unpublished material), consultations with key actors and gatekeepers, participation to meetings and events, informal talks. I abided by the ethical standards informing each participant about the nature of this investigation, granting them the right to choose whether they wanted their interview to be recorded or not, as much as their names mentioned. All the interviews have been conducted either in English or Spanish, but I benefitted from the study of Modern Greek and relied on translators when I felt this was not sufficient. The analysis that follows is built on extracts from recorded interviews, notes from the observations and literature. Nevertheless, the outcomes of this research are rooted into the contextual and cultural elements I had the chance to absorb and understand.

The eleven months total spent in the field between Greece and Argentina had a massive impact not only on the comprehension of local and transnational dynamics, but – perhaps more importantly – were crucial for a deep immersion in two rich cultures, bringing about personal interconnections with participants, leading to a form of scholar-activism that, hopefully, led me to become a trustworthy counterpart.

From the Epistemology to the Methodology: the Extended Case Method

In this section I will present my methodological standpoint in the light of the above theoretical framework. I consider subjectivity and the role of the researcher towards the participants, embracing the principles of the Extended Case Method (ECM) and dissecting them, adding the layer of anti-hegemonic history and reflecting on my experience on the field.

Morgan (1980) writes on how the epistemological position of a researcher influences not only the choice of the methodology, but even the everyday approach to the research, at least on three levels: 1) on how the researcher and its participants interact; 2) in the ways in which data collection methods are determined and their rigorousness pursued; 3) and finally on how the research is communicated to an audience. The search for knowledge in this peculiar field of labour studies, rather than being merely theoretical, and instead of seeking refuge in 19th century theoretical dissections on class struggles, had to imply a high degree of commitment, immersion and

reasoning *with* the actors. This exercise was conceived as liberating from ideologies and preconceptions, looking for deeper understanding behind and beyond the praxes, and at the same time without sacrificing the under-evaluated importance of practical knowledge on the altar of labour theories.

Since knowledge does not exist in a state awaiting discovery (Gordon 2009), and given that there is no "extra-worldly or extra-social point of view" (Schmidt 2001, p.138), my approach to the field was ethnographical, attributing positive value to the 'disturbances' created by the researcher in the context of investigation. Given that this research is built upon a socio-constructivist epistemology, I embraced the Extended Case Method (Burawoy 1998), the 'slow' ethnomethodology (Almond and Connolly 2019), and the 'storyteller' approach of Motta's (2016). The focus was on iterative processes, aiming to reach a deeper understanding of the phenomenon by examining 'interlockages' between complexes of variables across societies. Furthermore, these approaches insisted on the contextual understanding of such societies, with peculiar attention to histories and cultures, filtered through subjectivities of the actors involved.

The ECM takes advantage of the ethnographic condition of the researcher, and of his subjectivity, rather than trying to contain it. It then works by extending out peculiar situations and unique cases, but instead than focusing on 'objective truths', it relies on the power of dialogues and on 'extralocal determinators'. Particularly considering the workplace and the community as preferred loci for the investigation, this methodology was deemed consistent given it has been used by other scholars (Vieta 2012) for similar contexts. Even if the two – workplace and communities – might initially appear as separate elements, as the research will develop it would be possible to observe how, in the case of self-managed work activities, these merge into the community, which in turns might end up embedding unconventional organisational experiences as vital part of its undercurrents. In this sense, the ECM allows the researcher to expand the space of 'plant sociology' discourses and make them overflow beyond the working space.

Burawoy (1998) then adds the element of reflexive science, underlining how this is built upon dialogue and intersubjectivity between participant and observer, or "enjoys what positive science separates: participant and observer, knowledge and social situation, situation and its field of location, folk theory and academic theory" (p.14) in line with the theoretical argument equivalating cognitive and non-cognitive knowledge. "Reflexive science sets out from a dialogue between us

and them, between social scientists and the people we study". And Burawoy concludes "It does not spring from an Archimedean point outside space and time [...]. It starts from a stock of academic theory on the one side and existent folk theory or indigenous narratives on the other. Both sides begin their interactions in real locations" (*Ibid.*). This is where and how my research began, positioned in real location, at the crossroad of folk narratives, or self-narratives of workers and activists, and academic theory. Such interpretation also provides the basis for personal commitment in the field and individual engagement with participants, which eventually might result in scholar activism.

What is arguably the most interesting aspect of the ECM is the concept of 'extralocal determinators' (*Ibid., p.6*). This is the feature that the ECM adds to the contextualised ethnography, claiming the necessity to contemplate all the layers of external influences on the studied scenario. Such concept impacts on the process of reducing locally collected and deeply contextualised data into generalised concepts up to the level where it is possible to reason about 'reverberations', 'recuperations', 'Communalism'.

The ECM succeeds in doing so by "dig[ging] beneath the political binaries of [...] metropolis and periphery, capital and labour, to discover multiple processes, interests and identities" (*Ibid*.). In the same breath, the ECM is fit for the setting of workers in self-management since this resembles the description of an environment that could "provide fertile ground for recondensing [...] proliferating differences around local, national and global links", or – paraphrasing - a context that makes extralocal interactions blossom.

By using the ECM any researcher should seriously consider its limits and possible contradicting elements. The most harmful externalities for an ECM study are the power forces impacting on the field of research. Burawoy (1998) provides an example of the ECM applied to a post-colonial scenario entangled in colonial forces. In my case, power forces are mainly composed by the clamps of the state and market. The former tries to normatise and depoliticise the studied experiences, the latter to absorb or destroy them. This double form of violence affects and ultimately steers the political outcome of the experiences I am studying. With regards to this limitation, the ECM acknowledges the social embeddedness of a reflexive research. Context should always be the researcher's departure point. From this, it is possible to thematise our presence in the world we study. Dialogue is the next step.

It is worth noticing that in his theory Burawoy (1998) insists on the legitimacy of the ECM against positivist approaches, thus attributing a 'scientific validity' to his model. He declares that his approach stands in between of positive and anti-positive science, while I would preferably agree with Zygmunt Bauman (2013b) when he writes that intellectuals should abandon their legislative pretentions for an interpretive role, instead mediating between communities. In the same spirit, Haraway (2013) calls for networks of situated knowledges to escape the 'sureness' of the cyborg and reconcile with our human experience. While I embrace the ECM in its applicable principles and with its philosophy, I situate myself closer to a rejection of positivist principles in their entirety.

History and non-hegemonic history are reputed equally crucial when approaching these experiments of workers' self-management. As observed in the last part of the epistemology, there is in this methodology a commitment to make subjects commonly denied by dominant forms of knowledge visible. A "history of the oppressed and marginalised" is vital for this research since through it we can find the means, the ends, the practices and the politics as they emerged, in the context where they shaped. Particularly interesting is thus to look between the glued pages of history where social movements were capable of experimenting with direct democracy, and where marginal groups configurated new strategies of resistance and self-organisation.

Perhaps even more important are the (missing) links, the hidden flows connecting distant histories. Using the concept of 'reverberations' I will try to value them, to focus on their capacity to channel emancipatory praxes, to demonstrate their nature of 'living legacy' and 'resonating forces'. As Walter Benjamin wrote, history is a "secret rendez-vous between past generations and our own" (on Sitrin, 2014, p. 14). Workers' in self-management, from Greece to Argentina, are undoubtedly fragments of a wider anti-systemic wave. Even more, they contribute to enhance networks and interconnections, in the end contributing to "the coming together of multiple locally based campaigns into transnational networks around specific issues and of the development of an array of summit protests, social fora, alternative media, and other sites contesting the legitimacy of the New World Order" (Cox and Nilsen 2007, pp. 424-425). Methodologically, history is thus central to present the socio-political context of these experiences, and to understand what the drivers behind the present times are, as well as to grasp the kind of narratives that run through the veins of workers in self-management.

Coming back to the ECM after having added the historical layer, it is worth considering four constructive contributions that Burawoy (1998) lists, each of them facing its own limitations represented by the action of specific power forces. Such explicit acknowledgment of *power* within this theory is here considered tremendously significant since it aligns the ECM with mayor anarchist interpretations of the forces crisscrossing our societies (Ackelsberg 2013). The main elements listed in the ECM are intervention, process, aggregation and reconstruction. Their respective negatives are represented by domination, silencing, objectification and normalisation.

Intervention means valorising the presence of the researcher among the participants. As said, it is a "virtue to be explored" (Burawoy 1998, p.14) rather than an externalisation to be minimised. I will go further to say I do not deem my presence to have created 'disturbances' in otherwise natural frequencies, but rather that no 'neutral' frequencies exist to begin with. This corroborates my active role stance among the participants, and the purpose of constructing an analysis that could end up being a useful tool of self-reflection for the actors I am still in touch with. The negative of intervention is domination. While intervention can be positively framed, domination means to acknowledge that the researcher presence in the field situates him/her in already existing hierarchical structures. This is one of the negative 'effects of power' Burawoy lists to exemplify the limits of the ECM. "As participants in sites invested with hierarchies, competing ideologies, [...] we are trapped in networks of power" (*Ibid.,* p.22).

Process is defined as the act of extrapolating useful information for the researcher, and on this the reflexive approach would allow to "unpack [...] situational experiences by moving with the participants through their space and time" (*Ibid.,* p.14). What I tried to do with my participants is precisely to 'follow' them through both their interpretative schemes and physically, in their spaces of work and interrelations (for instance, during the days spent walking around Textiles Pigüé, accompanied by one or more workers, I stopped to chat with others, to have a drink with a group working in administration, to observe the women meeting in the factory, etc.). For Burawoy, this approach is the antipode of survey methods, and it is the reason that convinced me to utilise in-depth but fundamentally unstructured interviews or even informal chatting as a gate to access 'situational knowledge'. Furthermore, this approach adds up to what in slow methodology is the comprehension of 'tacit knowledge' or 'non-discursive elements', allowing the researcher to have

a glimpse of unexplained dynamics, hierarchies, actions, etc. The limitation, for what concerns process, is represented by silencing, which could be phrased in a question: am I considering all the voices? Since in the research process a reduction to main instances and principles is necessary for the comprehension, voices recorded, or observations taken might be crystallised into one narrative, forcingly excluding, marginalising and distorting other points of view coming from the same 'group' studied. Or, even worse, some voices might not even be visible to the eyes of the researcher having been silenced by the group of participants themselves.

The crucial issue about *aggregating* 'situational knowledge' is perhaps where Burawoy's intellectual contribution is sounder and adds a pivotal element to this research methodology. Rather than calling it 'structuration', as he does, I would stick to the term 'aggregation', in explaining the process of interpretative reduction of "situational knowledge into social process" (*Ibid.,* p.15). The Extended Case Method relies on Participant Observation with the goal to study the everyday world dynamics from an inside standpoint. The enemy of such aggregation process is objectification, that "reflects the very real power exercised by political, economic, and cultural systems over lifeworlds" (Habermas 1987 on Burawoy 1998, p.23). A possible antidote, as Burawoy argues, is to always be prepared to recognise and take into consideration subterranean eruptions that might eventually break up the field of forces where we settle our analysis.

Last comes the *reconstruction* process, where generalities are produces for academic consumption, at best by reconciling data in a sound theoretical scheme, at worst by normalising them and making them suitable for our theory, or our theory satisfactory for the data. Burawoy (1998) stresses the importance to approach the field with a solid theory behind, so that when we generalise to reconstruct, we elaborate upon this existing theory rather than 'discovering'. "We can move from one generality to another, to more inclusive generality" (*Ibid.,* p.16). I argue that a praxis-driven anarchist lens allows to fulfil a "reconstruction that leave[s] core postulates intact, [...] and that absorb anomalies with parsimony, offering novel angles of vision, [... one which] should lead to surprising prediction" (*Ibid.*).

The ECM was a main reference for the fieldwork and the analysis, yet in the attempt to overcome its limitations and the problems of externalities, power forces, misrepresentations, and silenced

voices, I opted to add a couple of complementary elements. The first is a reinterpretation of the ethnographic tradition apt for the environment of labour studies and proposes to reduce the speed of the research to catch sight of what is happening *between* the cracks of power. The second infers at becoming a 'storyteller' as a way to take off our dominant, patriarchal, colonialist clothes and become partisan creatures capable of speaking and hearing the language of the oppressed, therefore escaping domination, silencing, objectification and normalisation.

A Slow Approach for Participant Observation

What I call 'slow approach' derives from the concept of slow strategy or slow methodology developed by Almond and Connolly in their manifesto (2019) intended as an instrument for an anthropological research in the field of industrial relations, and particularly in the case of comparative or semi-comparative investigations. The speed of such research should, indeed, be slow, yet its depth significant enough. On an imaginary spectrum, we can collocate this approach at the opposite pole to a data-extractivist or 'parachute' research. While the latter has generally more standardised questions, with relatively little deviation from ordinary methodologies used in the field, the former relies much more on iterative processes, and is more tolerant of deviations from the methodologies since it assigns more importance to the different societal contexts.

The slow strategy, if compared to a fast approach, is much less concerned about maximising the comparability of respondents, while it seeks to distinguish and evaluate counter-narratives. In terms of access, it sees opportunities as occasions to approach actors and data, and considering the uppermost relevance of the geographical context, it has a robust component of societal reflexivity – or ethnography of societies. Another important aspect of its low speed is the open-ended nature of the research project: while a faster strategy would be constituted by a clear beginning and conclusion, the slow approach has a low degree of closure in its projects.

The other side of the coin, nevertheless, is the research depth, being its slow speed purposely intended to reach a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. A superficial or 'thin' approach would probably rely on contingency-driven methods, aiming to reach a transversal knowledge of the subject area rather than a profound understanding of societal elements. On the contrary, the slow methodology tends to problematise assumptions of comparability of standardised variables,

examines 'interlockages' between complexes of variables across societies, and seeks for a contextual understanding of societies, histories, cultures. A slow research, in synthesis, asks the researcher to 'get to know the smell of the place'.

> The question that arises from this is how the researcher manages to access societal logics, and to understand the (multiple and conflicting) processes of thoughts that have currency in guiding action in specific societies. Our core argument is that this means acquiring a deep understanding of societal dynamics, and that this is not at all easy to achieve. Furthermore, in our experience this mostly occurs outside the formal research processes found within defences of methodology, and hence is quite difficult to evaluate, as it is difficult to reconcile with norms of positive science around reliability and replicability (Burawoy 1998; Katz 2015). Above all, it is a very iterative process which tends to take a long time (Almond and Connolly 2017, pp.7-8)

While only partially innovative, this methodology finds its roots in the ethnographic tradition since, among its methods, the most important would be participant observation. For anthropologists and social scientists this is a method "in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture" (Musante and DeWalt 2010, p.1).

Culture is the key word for any anthropologist, even more when performing participant observation. Malinowski (1922; 1935) is considered among the founders of the discipline and theoriser of the methods used to conduct a participant observation. In a very minimal synthesis, the time spent with society is fundamental, the role of observer and listener within such society, as well as the ability to balance how to get involved in daily life *as one of them* without 'going native' considered crucial.

Mead (2000) fundamentally reinterpreted such an immersive approach by using it not to study disappearing cultures, but instead to focus on contemporary, 'living' cultures. Even more, her work would put the emphasis on the insufficiency of just listening and observing in a cultural context, thus resulting in a suggestively diverse approach rather than the 'holistic understanding' of Malinowski. Stocking (1984) notes that there are three main modes of ethnographic data collections, namely participation, observation and interrogation. Malinowski relied mainly on the second and the third, while Mead gave more relevance to the first.

Taking elements from the enormous treasure of ethnographic investigations, the 'slow method' introduces a couple of innovative features. The first element would be the applicability of a form of

participant observation in the context of industrial relations, or – as per this research – in the environment of anti-hegemonic cooperatives. What becomes thought-provoking here is that while ethnographic studies within industries, factories and businesses, far from being the standard, have been occasionally conducted through the last decades (Ong 2010; Jaumier 2017), entering these environments with a slow approach calls for 'opening the doors' of such workplaces. As in a proper ethnography, the researcher needs to *be* there, but while to identify what 'there' means is relatively simple for the stereotypical anthropologist immersed into the life of a remote isolated community (or perhaps for the one circumscribing his study to a 'plant sociology'), the same is not valid for an ethnography of a scattered and fragmented 'movement'.

One way to provide an answer to these questions would be to establish imaginary barriers and focus just on workplace dynamics, only considering the actors in this environment, and taking notes of their behaviours. A radically opposite interpretation would be to just hang around the place and wait to see what happens. Obviously, this does not imply direct access to the workplace should not be sought, or opportunities refused should they arise. Yet, anything 'environmental', such as the broader urban dynamics, the socio-economic situation of the country, the eating and drinking habits of the locals, the culturally favoured meeting places, all come down to a better understanding of the group of workers, their culture, their nuances and, ultimately, an accurate comprehension of the political connotations behind and beyond their organisation's walls. Even further, I argue, these moments are necessary to understand what they intend referring to their 'community'.

The caustic novels of Petros Markaris read amidst the commuters in the metro of Athens, the overheard conversations coming from an open-air bar in the neighbourhood of Exarcheia, an afternoon spent drinking and talking about politics in a militant journalist's backyard garden in Bahia Blanca, and the popular songs heard at night in a crowded *tango* bar in Almagro, Buenos Aires, might all be seen as examples of how to spend leisure time during a field research in Greece and Argentina. Yet, these and many other informal and casual moments were hugely important occasions to immerse into local cultures, register beliefs and take note of how people phrase their common experiences. The most significant amount of data collection was concentrated into in-depth interviews with workers, studying of second-hand sources, participating in conferences, meetings and groups talk. Yet, the environmental and cultural fabric made of 'free' observation and

'non-work related' moments constitutes another thick layer upon which this research stands up. Moreover, it is only through this contextual, societal and cultural lens that the observed phenomena can be deciphered to reveal their nature, as much as power dynamics dismantled and questioned.

The slow approach became an axis of my methodology since it allowed to study the 'reverberations' of political praxes, rather than a comparison of workplaces that would have been nearly impossible considering the specificities of these actors within their contexts.

One final reference to the centrality of a process of *deconstruction* and *creation* behind both the theoretical approach and the methodology should here be made. Taking what is known, fractionating it and recomposing it creatively is the strategy behind the praxes of workers in self-management, as well as, hopefully, behind this research process. This correspondence between the two was progressively sought as the research developed, not decided beforehand. The common route taken in this process implies, as elsewhere stated, the entering into of a process of *unlearning* (Motta 2011). Necessary for this is not just a rejection of any given 'truth' or, in a broader sense, any positivist statement. An exit from predominant narratives is due, here referring not merely to the leading neoliberal narrative, but *also* from widespread counter-narratives from the Left. How it is then possible to interpret any labour movement, no matter how new or creative, without main schemes of reference, without immediately judging it through the lens of Marxist theories, just to begin with? The answer, as explained in the previous chapter, was adopting the lens of praxis-driven anarchism.

The journey is from praxes to theory, or theories, as a multiplicity of non-exclusive political interpretations. Only then, these latter are analysed in an historical comparison, considering elements from a long and extremely rich tradition of labour studies. To focus on practice does not mean to undervalue any previous theoretical contribution, but instead just to *begin* with an observation of practices, then to reconnect to political histories, social movements, etc. Motta (2011) does it in its reference to Venezuelan collectives, Dinerstein (2015) reinforces it when affirming that "learning takes place in infinite and continuous processes of reflection on practice" (quoting Pizetta 2007, p. 243). Sitrin (2006) puts high value in direct observation when registering the very own interpretations of Argentinians.

The interpretation here given to the methodology had to be anti-positivist, since praxes are the most tangible thing to be so distant from any given 'reality'. There is no 'natural society' emerging underneath the layers of self-organisation and autonomism (as argued by Öcalan, 2007). Instead, the people here involved are part of a constantly renovating mixture, of long traditions and multiple ruptures, and they are not seeking for the ultimate liberation, the final struggle, to rejoice their very nature. They are instead deconstructing their present through everyday praxes, difficulty managing to survive by balancing market obligations and government impositions with their restless utopias of liberation. The belief in a final revolution, however widespread, is not visible here. Rather, nothing appears as definitive, and such impatience is closer to a "permanent cultural revolution" (Giroux and McLaren 1997, p.149). They are in constant movement, the only condition which seems to 'naturally' belong to human beings. The instruments that I used to observe them were thus aiming to picture their flow, rather than encapsulate their supposed 'definitive' essence.

> The accusation of "unrealisable utopia" to autonomous movements and the demand that they should make explicit what is the alternative they are fighting for is wrong: 'transformative action', he says, 'does not require a future vision of society as a whole … it can be seen as an horizon or perspective of the rainbow type: like it, it has brilliant colours and is always unreachable [as argued by Foucault] (Foucault, 1979)' (Esteva 2011, p.136).

The ECM, a slow ethnomethodology, and the realisation that this is a study of a flow still lack the fundamental element of the personal commitment. I then embraced the 'storyteller' approach to fill this gap. The latter completes the picture and provides the methodological elements necessary to present a comprehensive history of a 'movement' from an internal, antagonist and radical point of view.

Becoming a Storyteller

According to Motta (2016), the storyteller is the opposite of a prophet. She enters the community, lives with it, tries to grasp its dynamics. Eventually, she can take part in the emancipatory prefiguration of the phenomenon studied, but before daring to do so, a journey to un-learn the mainstream patterns and overcome the undisputable theoretical contributions must begin. As in Grubačić (2016), "we sought not to analyse our subjects but to hear their voices" (p.2). Even Kropotkin, when describing himself during his research in 1909, stated he was "a simple traveller" (Todes 1987, p.546).

In action, the storyteller moves in, against and beyond the crystallized paradigms of social relations imposed by capitalism. As Motta (2016) synthesizes, "for the storyteller to transform capitalism is a praxical task which implies a stepping inward to the contours of everyday life and inhabiting the fractured locus between processes of subjectification and active processes of decolonizing subjectivity" (p. 40). She also warns that the methodology of the storyteller should aim at reaching a 'critical intimacy' with the subjects, as opposed to the 'groundless distance' of the prophetic intellectual (Motta 2015).

On the latter, she compares the prophetic discourses of Žižek to meta-epistemological attempts to know subjectivities and humanities by reconstructing their stories. And quotes Christian (1987) when she argues the following.

> How our theorising (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in a narrative form, in the stories we create, in the riddles and proverbs, in the play with language. How else have we managed to survive with such spiritedness the assault on our bodies, social institutions, countries and our very humanity? (p.54).

All the literature we can have access to is unbalanced given the weight powerful, prophetic white male had over it. To become a storyteller means to acknowledge this and step out of the past. In the words of Motta (2016) "[t]he storyteller is a figure who moves away from such patriarchal and racist enactments of masculinity towards a caring and nurturing self who is able to participate in, and contribute to the building of, community". (pp. 40-41). The last word, community, is of pivotal importance for this research, perhaps it summarises the whole aim of it: to research from the community, for the community, seeking how the community prefigures itself in *another* way.

This links also with the epistemologies of the South – the way in which we reconstruct 'southern' stories by refusing ethnocentric European interpretation (hence the use of *autogestión* in its Spanish meaning, for instance). The approach is, in this sense, post-colonial, meaning that by refusing a hierarchical, patronising Eurocentric interpretation of the phenomena, there is a rejection of the capitalistic relations, the colonial system of power imposition, that resonates in the written knowledge. Lugones (2010, p.784) says that "global capitalist colonial system is in every way successful in its destruction of people's knowledges, relations and economies".

Methodologically, to try being a storyteller meant to try constructing moments of dialogue rather than pure and simple interviews, to nurture mutual recognition, to embrace a 'multiple emotional palette' (Motta, 2016). This then meant to accept an emotionally challenging experience, a trip to the borders of our self and our certainties, precisely described by Anzaldúa (1987, p.47): "every increment of consciousness, every step forward is a *travesia*, a crossing. I am again an alien in new territory. And again, and again". Frustration is far from absent in such a journey, yet when one feels recognised as a storyteller in the dialogue the feeling is reversed and fills the emptiness of a long – sometimes solitary – journey. The sensation is then that of wholeness, of joy, courage and love. Of being part of a community even, if just, as a storyteller.

What is then the role of a storyteller if part of such a community? To decolonise minds and spirits beyond the community and strengthen the community's self-perception of being able to make its free knowledge resonate.
In the vivid words of bell hooks: "writing, teaching and habits of being [are] fundamentally linked to a concern with creating strategies that will enable colonised folks to decolonise their minds and actions, thereby promoting the insurrection of subjugated knowledges" (hooks 1990, p. 341).

A crucial ingredient to be a storyteller is to try becoming multidimensional, as opposed to the monolithic one-dimensionality of the prophet, as well as to become "intensely embodied in the present and processes of (their) bodies and thus attentive to the rootedness of community in history, spatiality, cosmology, culture and social relations" (Motta 2016, p.43). Throughout the analysis I will often refer to histories, cultural elements, broader social relations. And since an alternative history of community relations has not been written yet, I will necessarily have to consider the 'official histories', yet this would allow me to see where cracks have emerged, at least the ones we can spot. History, nonetheless, would grant me the practicality this research builds upon, not refusing theorising, but rather imposing a narrative where praxis always comes first. In this sense, a history of power and oppression allows the storyteller to spot the signals of a change, of a mutation, of a 'crack'. The crack must not be associated with an intellectual exercise, but rather to an unmediated and sudden need for change emerging from the community. And the actor doing it is not easily categorisable following the prophetic interpretations of social phenomena. The crack is made by us, we are doing it, and then we theorise about it. The storyteller moves from these

presuppositions to enter the field and encounter the actor, not as a separate being 'above' them, but rather horizontally, as a counterpart, aiming only to tell the story we, together, are creating.

Both the actor and the storyteller should thus be able to enter a dialogue, "an exchange of ideas and critical conversations that emerge from reality [...] Dialogue is the meeting of people mediated by the world, which enables such a speaking of the world" (Freire, cited in Cotos 2013, p.112). "The storyteller unlike the prophet does not seek aesthetic, epistemological and linguistic separation from the popular" (Motta 2016, p.44), for the popular – the oppressed, the marginals – are the most likely to develop "the most complex and multiple forms of liberatory praxis" by themselves. The storyteller is located at the centre of the people at the margins, and the margins are "the location of radical openness and possibility" (*Ibid.*).

Ultimately, the storyteller is just a participant, and as such I approached the subjects. Not as a prophet, nor as a person looking to free them, but rather hoping to join them in their constant and embedding movement towards collective emancipation. "The storyteller enters in her nakedeness in such spaces not as the liberated or the liberator but as a participant in the practices of healing" (*Ibid.*).

Methods of Data Collection

The methodological foundations of the ECM, the slow methodology and the 'storyteller' equipped me with a toolbox to use on the field that would abide by their principles. I decided to spend enough time in both Greece and Argentina aiming to absorb and condense the cultural knowledge and the historical-contextual features. I opted to access the workplaces introducing myself as scholar-activist, I valued their theorisations, and I positioned myself at the same level of the workers. I observed them in their dynamics at meetings and I was repeatedly involved into informal talks. This allowed me to add every time another link to reinforce my network of contacts and move on to get acquainted with another subject. By using this snowballing technique, I managed to interface with all the subjects of this research as much as many others I did not include in the final analysis. The outcome of this repeated exercise were narratives, stories, bits, fragments of their journey in self-management. I extended from them intending to paint the mosaic of the movement of autogestión.

Nonetheless, while in the field I also benefitted from the methods and the recommendations of other scholars, that I deemed coherent with my ethico-methodological standpoints. Kokkinidis, benefitting from his Greek language knowledge, based his two months field research in Athens and Thessaloniki, selecting three case studies. In his article (2015b), he gives an insightful list of challenges he faced, namely: 1) negotiating access to the workers' collectives; 2) overcoming the scepticism of two participants[4]; 3) disabling the risk of having a biased interpretation in doing a mere collection of participants' self-reporting and self-judgment of their own experiences.

His favoured solutions were, respectively, 1) initially contacting some of the members either by phone or email and explaining to them the nature of his research project, then to arrange informal meetings and clarify his intentions before proceeding with the interviews and group discussions; 2) to minimise his academic role, sometimes even critiquing his own academic position within a Faculty of Management, but perhaps more significantly by "[allowing] my participants to communicate their ideas rather than me speaking for them" (*Ibid.*, p.854), carefully deciding when to stand just listening and shadowing, and when to act, engage and stimulate. This sensibility during his time with the participants, together with his mixed positioning being an academic and an activist, allowed him to be considered a reliable interlocutor and trustworthy researcher; 3) he combined interviews with participant observation, thus exploring their routines and how they would "advance of lose alternatives in these groups, how work is organized and their inter-work relationships, as well as the tensions that inhabit autonomous practices and the constraints that market mediations imposed on self-management and workplace democracy" (*Ibid.*, p.845).

I took into deep consideration every proposal he made and incorporated them to bolster and fortify my methodological approach on the field. The issue of accessibility, my delicate positioning and the limits of participants' subjectivities in the research narrative were all matters of profound reasoning and cyclical readjustment from the beginning and until the last days in the field.

The access to workers' collectives 1) while in Greece was sought through the cooperative Syn Allois and its networks. I had preliminary access to Syn Allois thanks to their engagement in a Zapatista coffee project I know and support in my Italian hometown. From Italy, and through common

[4] That, he believes, surged from what was described as a strong anti-intellectualism widespread among many activists (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010).

friends, I thus had the contact of Stavroula, who guided me through local networks. Moments of exchange and interaction such as the UniverSSE 2017 in Athens were taken as chances to meet other potential subjects. Likewise, in Argentina, all the participants were firstly approached during the days of the Workers' Economy meeting, a sensational occasion to spend time together and share opinions with several workers and activists.

Scepticism of participants represented a significant challenge, not only considering my academic role – thus, for them, external, potentially voyeuristic and non-work related –, but even bearing in mind the novelty I represented among the group of researchers they were already aware of, and sometimes in confidence with. As for any experience in life, I had the chance to be warmly welcomed and immediately accepted by persons who did not know me (a recurrent feeling during my round of interviews across Crete) as much as treated with suspicion. But in truth, it never happened that I had to fight for their attention, frustratingly trying to break the ice or keeping the focus of the interview. I consider this to reflect their capacity of empathising and the comprehension derived from their exercise of direct democracy and the quality of relationships developed within the assembly.

Nevertheless, I had also to make my choices considering accessibility. I chose, where I had reasons to believe it was correct, not to force access, respecting the situations where I felt the workers had been 'invaded' by previous researchers (for instance, the cafeteria Pagkaki, which enters my research even if I chose not to conduct any interview with them). Throughout the field research, I identified four aspects or decisions that helped me to become a reliable counterpart of the participants in a relatively short time, namely:

a) I benefitted from the fact that these workers are engaged in an ethical exercise of direct democracy and in an effort of inclusiveness, which usually implies high respect for anyone interested in them, possibly including myself;

b) when I was contacting them by email or message, alongside explaining who gave me the contact, I opted for an honest, direct and immediate clarification of my positioning. I thus anticipated and openly stated my activist perspective for the workers' self-management cause, alongside my willingness to include them in my research. On many other occasions I benefitted from a chain effect, when someone, who I had just met and interviewed, introduced me to others, presenting

me as a 'friend' or a '*compañero*', very rarely as a plain 'researcher'. Such presentations gained me some aspects of respect and recognition;

c) another element that helped me overcome scepticism was to raise the level of trust from the beginning of every interview by openly talking about myself and the purpose of my study. The latter required a substantial preliminary study about the cooperative, their story, their networks and even profiling their members individually, if necessary. After this delicate exercise to balance an open personal presentation while demonstrating knowledge about their project, I then stated that I preferred to record the interview, but only with their permission. On many occasions, I was authorised to record and utilise everything they said. In a few others, I was told not to use specific sentences in my transcripts, or not to mention their (or others) names. Only once I was permitted an interview, or rather an informal meeting, at the specific condition that none of what we discussed was ever to be recorded or disclosed. Still, the meeting represented an occasion for me to understand veiled dynamics;

d) lastly, my choice was to respect their working time and space. The time they offered me for the interview was during their working shifts. This meant interviews paused, were interrupted, were limited by work duties, or even postponed. All the interviewees I met during their shifts made a huge effort to gift me with long talks and few interruptions, yet I took the chance of pauses to observe them during an ordinary day at their self-managed workplace. Looking for fair treatment for every participant, each interviewee's name will be reported differently according to what was the explicit or even perceived will to be identified or not. When I had doubts on this regard, a preference was always given to the most respectful choice, thus avoiding names.

Exploring their routine as a means to grasp their dynamics and avoid mere self-reporting of participants surely represented the toughest challenge. Whilst on this my objective did not exactly match Kokkinidis' – since here the aim is of a broader representation of a 'movement', rather than creating case studies of specific actors as an insider – nevertheless, I tried to share with my participants some of their working hours. This was rarely the case, instead it proved much more difficult than expected. Previously, when talking about overcoming scepticism, I explained the relative smoothness in accessing 'open' workplaces where people relate to each other following an ethic of democracy and respect. The other side of the coin appears here, when it comes to staying with them during their shifts: since all of them work in the precarious, uncertain and harsh

conditions that the market and state impose on self-managed co-ops, just standing there observing was considered disrespectful, whilst to ask them to be assigned work duties – in a condition of voluntarism – seemed completely inappropriate or unfeasible.

Nevertheless, attempts were made to participate in their work routine, and as for Kokkinidis the assembly was identified as the moment to observe their dynamics in action, thus I made an effort to be included during these times. A few were the chances to join internal meetings, yet the core of the research was built during *other* assemblies, namely the ones where workers from different co-ops were networking and interacting, such as the VI Workers' Economy gatherings. In this sense, I made my own Kokkinidis' method by applying it to broader forums, where I could take notes and record synergies, tensions and inter-work relationships at 'movement' level.

Concerning my abilities with the Greek language, I was aware this represented one of my toughest challenges when approaching the participants and their discussion stage. I therefore managed to study and achieve a basic level of Greek knowledge, which allowed me not to be completely lost when standing alone in a Greek speaking environment. Even so, I left for Greece aware of the fact that I needed translation, which I effectively benefitted from for transcription of meetings and, partially, for the translation of written documents. Nevertheless, I decided to take part even in those meetings where Greek was the only language used. After having had them translated, my expectation was to be able to match the feelings and behavioural elements I could take note of at such meetings with the spoken words I then had in an English written form.

While this challenge was critical for Greek language, I possess good knowledge of Spanish language. Especially considering how Argentinian is smoother than Spanish's Castellano for a mother tongue Italian speaker, I encountered no problem when I had to communicate with participants, attend meetings or explain myself while in the Latin American country.

By and large, the exclusion criteria in the selection of the participants was a filter I added on top of the snowballing technique, leading me to include or discard actors considering whether or not they seemed to know, understand and embrace the principles and praxes of autogestión (I will describe them in Chapter 4). The excluded can be classified into two groups. The first did not make it to the analysis since I decided to focus on other actors for their specificities and unique characteristics they had if compared to them. Still, given more time it would have been important to include these

subjects as well. Belonging to this group: Gráfica Campichuelo, Unión Solidaria de Trabajadores, GCoop, Cooperativa 19 de Diciembre, La Dignidad, La Huella, and Frigorífico INCOB. The second group comprises those actors that claimed to embody alterity and behave autonomously but were unintelligible as performers of autogestión under the lens of praxis-driven anarchism. As such, they were deemed not significant for the context of this research. Belonging to the second group: Solidarity4All/Dock, Welcommon (Anemos Ananeosis), Fair Trade Hellas, and Tienda Consumo Solidario Consol. The case of Bios.Coop is prominent but debated and, for what concerns my interpretation, it did not result as entirely convincing for its political nature and purpose. Nevertheless, I thank all these actors for granting me access to their establishments and time for interviews and observations.

In the annex, I report the list of interviewees and an example of guidelines used to conduct interviews, but it should be kept relevant how the talks regularly trespassed the boundaries of an arranged interview and became longer (usually lasting between one and two hours) and more fluid, allowing me to spot the dynamic elements I was looking for when leaving for Greece and Argentina.

Participant Observation at Meetings

Alongside the interviews and observations conducted within cooperatives, WRCs and other forms of workers' collectives, participation at meetings represented a major source for data harvesting. Meetings are the nexus between distant experiences, where similar praxes mingle with divergent theorisations and vice versa. From a researcher perspective, these occasions were extremely fruitful for at least three reasons. Firstly, meetings provided the perfect platform where to progressively add the component of scholar-activism to participant observation. This ignited a reinforcing cycle that allowed to become more recognisable and trustable by the participants, simultaneously bringing to strengthening and broadening the network. Secondly, meetings are where interconnections become intense, and the extra-local forces at work, synergy attempts and failures distinguishable. The single cases studied all share a determination to seek for mutual support among what they consider to be their peers and counterparts.

Lastly, meetings happen at the analytical level where this research lays: the major part of the literature on WRCs and workers' self-management is made of single case in-depth analyses

(Castronovo 2018; Rakopoulos 2014a), or country-specific studies (Ruggeri, Martínez, and Trinchero 2005; Nasioulas 2012). My choice was rather an attempt to extrapolate from the combination of literature and field research, a better understanding of the meso dynamics, where the local is influenced by distant phenomena, and the 'movement' as global actor bears the traces of many singular stories.

The first occasion of direct observation of internal dynamics was the Panhellenic Collaborative Workshop for Social and Solidarity Economy actors (abbreviated to Panhellenic Meeting) held in the city of Karditsa, in the Greek mainland region of Thessaly, on March 18 and 19, 2017. At the meeting, the second of its kind, the presence of members from Syn Allois, Vio Me and Bios.Coop among others provided an interesting ground for observations.

UniverSSE, the 4th European congress of Social and Solidarity Economy, was held at the Agricultural University of Athens from June 9 to 11, 2017. The meeting saw the presence of few self-managed experiences alongside more 'traditional' cooperatives, other SSE entities, federations (Ripess) and several institutes. This was a cause for reflection on the historical and political distinctiveness of self-managed experiences amid seemingly comparable subjects.

All the materials of the II Euromediterranean "Workers' Economy Gathering" (abbreviated to II Euromediterranean), held at Vio Me from October 28 to 30, 2016, were recovered thanks to the availability of the organising committee. The conference was unfortunately impossible to attend in person, whereas the transcripts obtained were added to the database and analysed.

The most important occasion of participation, observation and data collection was the VI Encuentro de la Economia de los Trabajadores (also VI Workers' Economy Gathering meeting; henceforth 'VI Encuentro'). The event took place from the August 22 to 30, 2017 in Buenos Aires, and from August 31 to September 3 in the town of Pigüé. The first section of preliminary activities included visits to several WRCs and cooperatives in the Greater Buenos Aires area (Campichuelo, Hotel B.A.U.E.N., GCoop, Chilavert, Tienda Consumo Solidario and La Huella, among others) together with presentations of international experiences – such as the seminar on Kurdish Cooperatives of Rojava with Azize Aslan, noteworthy in my research due to their influence on the Greek scenario. During these activities I had the chance to spend an important amount of time together with the Greek delegation of Vio Me which came to Argentina for the meeting. This

experience proved extremely significant to understand the specific interpretation made of autogestión by Vio Me workers while confronting with Argentinian experiences.

The VI Encuentro continued with its core activities moving the whole group of international participants to the town of Pigüé, where a four days conference was held for the large part hosted in the spaces of the WRC Textiles Pigüé. The conference also proved extremely fruitful for the opportunity to interact with other experiences as much as with well-known scholars of self-management, communalism and autonomy, such as Andrés Ruggeri, Marcelo Vieta, Arturo Anguiano, Marco Zurru, and José Miguel Gomez. I will also mention contributions of the French Association Autogestión[5], a fascinating organisation promoting popular education and the diffusion of autogestión.

Other significant occasions of networking and data collection were the Congreso de Economica Política held at the Centro Cultural de la Cooperación - Buenos Aires, October 18th; the presentation of a documentary on the self-managed experience of the Unión Solidaria de Trabajadores (UST) – Buenos Aires, November 3rd; and the conference organised to celebrate 15 Years of Faculdad Abierta, at their document centre in Chilavert, during which the last survey on Argentinian WRCs was presented and discussed – Buenos Aires, November 17th, 2017.

Then, I travelled South and spent a day with the workers of Frigorifico INCOB, a self-managed butchery in the outskirts of Bahia Blanca, where a local meeting was held to discuss common strategies and visiting the spaces of the occupied factory. This was followed by a public discussion held at the Universidad National del Sur with members of Textiles Pigüé, FaSinPat Zanón and other prominent Argentinian WRCs and key actors among the speakers.

Countless were the other occasions that contributed to shape, provide balance and substance to the historical, social and political ground this research is built upon. To mention just a few, the strikes and demonstrations in Plaza de Mayo with the Madres against the government of Macri, the moments of congregation and discussion for the disappearance of Santiago Maldonado[6], the

[5] https://autogestion.asso.fr

[6] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/09/thousands-march-missing-activist-santiago-maldonado-170901233035902.html

participation at mobilizations and congresses in Athens, not to mention the tens of conferences at events organised in the UK and Europe by academics and groups of scholars broadly interested in this sector of investigation. Without all these, the research would not possess the theoretical strength to stand up.

An investigation of the 'movement of autogestión' has the luck that occasions of meeting and interactions do not cease once the field period seems to be completed. Among the most notable, I participated and presented a contribution during the III Euromediterranean meeting held at the WRC RiMaflow in Milan, Italy (April 2019). This was a great opportunity to both reinvigorate the network and put to the test the analytical outcomes I was working on. The feedbacks gathered there found their place amid the words of this manuscript.

Data Analysis

The main tool used to carry out data analysis was the software NVivo. After having transcribed all the interviews and the other recordings, I uploaded them and organised them thematically together with field notes, observations, and every document collected first-hand.

Once harvested and organised all the data, the analytical approach utilised was thematical but with the purpose of remaining faithful to the spirit of the author's storytelling. In doing so, I sought inspiration from the methodology of 'open coding' of the grounded theory (Gibbs 2012). Thus, I prepared a structure of nodes and sub-nodes that were systematically revised while the analysis proceeded. I began from the interviews questions as a reference to construct horizontal descriptive nodes where to group all the comparable answers. These, though, were only used for initial guidance. Examples of early-stage descriptive samplings are 'workplace regulations', 'shifts and duties', and 'debating the legal status'.

When I started re-reading and de-structuring each interview, I highlighted and noted down all the major themes emerging. These were categorised in broader groups such as 'relations with the neighbours', 'knowledge transfers' and 'learning from the past'. Once grouped preliminarily, I then dismantled my original structure and rebuilt a new coding system rotating around emerged theoretical nodes. By the end of this process of modifying while re-reading, I ended up with a coherent structure from which I could extract comparable fragments from a single thematic node.

Although not moving from the prerequisites of grounded theory, this process drew from the principles of open coding, moving from descriptive samplings to selective theoretical nodes.

Yet, as mentioned, the goal was always to allow the reader to enter the narrative flow of the interviewed. Beyond my commitment to storytelling as a methodology, this was intended as an organisational attempt to minimise interpretative distortions: grouping fragments in the same node could, in fact, result in a misinterpretation of some interviewees' voices to strengthen a monochromatic argument.

Storytelling, for data analysis, was hence applied in two ways. The first consisted in re-reading each interview every time I opted to extract a fragment and insert it in the manuscript. For instance, rather than writing the section on 'Synergy' merely extracting and combining the pieces gathered in the node titled 'Synergy', I re-analysed each of these fragments in their original context. The idea was to remain always faithful to the gist of the whole interview, without extrapolating too much and abandoning the context.

Secondly, as visible throughout the manuscript, the extract and fragments reported tend to be lengthy, when necessary. While trying to preserve fluency in the explanations, I nonetheless opted to keep extracts from interviews long enough to make them became stories on their own – with an audible interviewee's voice – rather than mere single-line extracts. Hopefully, this should allow the reader to enter, even if just for a few seconds, the workers' cultural, organisational, and contextual universe. For this reason, throughout the analysis I juxtapose interviews' extracts with my descriptions of the workplace, or observations at meetings, extracts from flyers and anything else that could offer a more complete picture.

To recap, I organised my data analysis trying to let major themes emerge and guide me to structure the conceptual organisation of the thesis. But at the same time, I made an effort to let the reader 'enter the factory', walk with the workers, have a glimpse of the crowded Buenos Aires streets, becoming able to tell 'the smell of the place'. By the end of the work on NVivo, I had the following structure of major thematical categories of interviews extracts, on which I further elaborated and built the thesis' chapters:

Practicing autogestión

- Economics and organisation
    - Substituting capital with solidarity and labour
    - The centrality of the assembly
    - Economy of needs
    - Redistribution schemes
    - Entry and exit of members
    - Future means
- Politics and mutuality
    - De-alienation
    - Self-exploitation
    - Creative reconfigurations
    - Constructing networks / Interdependency (Ecosystems)
    - Independence and compromises
    - Re-semanticisations of labour
    - Decommodification of the workforce
    - Openness and trust
    - The commons
    - Affective politics (+ fulfilment and belongingness)
    - Un-blocking and creative resistance

Greek cooperativism and autonomy

- The partisan co-ops
- Protected and controlled (PASOK era)
- New laws and effects
- Legal status and debates
- Self-definitions
- Rediscoveries and re-appropriations
- Women's co-ops

Argentinian cooperativism and autonomy

- Workers' repression
- Piqueteros and workers
- Empresas recuperadas
- From Kirchnerismo to Macrismo
- The road to autogestión
- The legal process of recuperation
- Relations with unions and the two paths

Recuperating autonomy

- Centripetal and centrifugal forces
- Ngo-izations and co-optations
- In, against, beyond
- Antibodies of autonomism

Transmissions and mutualism

- Workers <–> academics
- Zapatistas and MST
- Asambleas –> workplaces
- Crisis as opportunity
- WRCs -> co-ops
- ARG workplaces -> GK workplaces
- Vio Me -> GK co-ops

- Outcomes
  - Community outreach
  - Synergy
  - Liminal points
  - Bi-directional flows
  - Living examples
  - Current transformations

We are community

- From praxes to politics
- Conflictual mutualism
- Come together
- Co-ops as community drivers
- Localised global proposals
- No one left behind / Intersectionality
- Creating a culture from the workplace
- Insecurity and individualism
- What the community wants
- Autogestión as weapon of the weak
- Limits to
    - Feminism
    - Environmentalism
    - Libertarian municipalism
- Converging trajectories

A Conclusive Self-reflection around Scholar Activism

The methodology built upon the ECM, the slow approach and the 'storyteller' merged into a positioning that, on the field, became that of a scholar-activist. While already anticipated before, it is worth concluding this chapter by reflecting on what becoming an activist while still being a scholar meant while conducting fieldwork.

Saul Alinsky, in his 1971 seminal book *Rules for Radicals* passionately lists the key qualities for a good radical activist, which, unsurprisingly, he appoints to radical community organisers as well.

> [the scholar-activist] detests dogma, defies any finite definition of morality, rebels against any repression of a free, open search for ideas no matter where they may lead. He is challenging, insulting, agitating, discrediting. He stirs unrest. As with all life, this is a paradox, for his irreverence is rooted in a deep reverence for the enigma of life, and an incessant search for its meaning (Alinsky 1989, p.73).

With this research I entered the world of self-managed workers, filled with critical management ideas and radical or creative techniques to reorganise human beings working together in a fairly

difficult socio-economic situation. This research is in constant motion, with the explicit hope not to end with the submission of the work done for the purpose of an academic title. The broader expectation and goal became to leave a trace in the world I committed to study, and at the same time to contribute and perhaps add a new perspective to the academic debate around these contemporary and life-permeating issues.

The objective of this last section is to question whether what has been done can be registered under the category of scholar-activism – and of what kind. This self-reflection encompasses the whole methodological chapter, yet an indisputable and conclusive answer is not likely to emerge from these words. This research is a process with its own momentum, and where it can lead to, both in terms of personal engagement and concerning the possibilities I will eventually be given in the future, is still uncharted territory.

Borras (2016) paraphrases the famous quote of Marx (1972) when describing scholar-activists as "those who explicitly aim not only to interpret the world in a scholarly way but to change it, and who are connected to a political project or social justice-oriented movement" (p.24). In this sense, my research has been engaging a political project if not a 'movement', thus this will be the starting point to reason about my investment toward scholar activism.

In his self-reflection where he considers his role during a research about land politics, Borras (2016) subdivides scholar-activists into three categories, the first being those who move from an academic position towards the political environment aiming to be connected with it; the second comprising activists based in social movements who move from there to become also scholars of a discipline; the third describing those who are located in non-academic independent institutions and are activists and scholars, providing the famous example of Susan George.

Following this categorisation, I would fall under the first type, having moved from an academic environment then to progressively become entangled in a political movement. Using another possible categorisation of immediate visual impact (Croteau 2005, pp. 32-35), I could argue the researcher behind these words started from a SCHOLAR-Activist point, hoping to get closer to becoming a SCHOLAR-ACTIVIST, while the third category of Scholar-ACTIVIST seems distant or perhaps to be considered only in a future tense.

The literature about scholar activism then enters the thorny bushes of contradictions coming along with this choice. The first can be expressed in the form of a question: how to survive, or even blossom, inside the academy *and* in a political movement at the same time? Or better, without compromising either one or both. Hale (2006) suggests taking a path leading to 'dual loyalties' (pp.97,100), opting for a divided commitment that embraces an academic rigorousness *and* to make the research work politically relevant. The methodology will surely be impacted by such dual positioning, but on the other hand "such tension is often highly productive" and "not only yields research outcomes that are potentially useful to the political struggle with which one is aligned; but it can also generate new insight and knowledge that challenge and transform convention academic wisdom" (*Ibid.*, p.105). The higher expectations surrounding this research bear a resemblance to these words of Hale. Nonetheless, this field of study already privileges non-conventional analyses, having been built by activists-academics themselves, and strongly influenced by participants' interventions in the literature. What I hope to bring to this stream is thus not a less ordinary or more conflictual point of view, quite useless in a highly self-examining environment, but rather to widen the space for a broader perspective of analysis considering the 'movement' in its whole.

Still, on the contradiction about being both a scholar and an activist, Piven (2010) points out that a commitment to activism from a scholar position does not necessarily imply a daily interaction with studied movements. This might mean the higher amount of pressure on the shoulders of the researcher could have an internal academic origin, which is something to be aware of. Nonetheless, as Borras (2016) argues, even if the political movement is not in a place of giving the researcher 'punishment or rewards' as academia might do, the feedback from the political world one is engaged with can have significant implication for a researcher. For instance, a well-received research project among the activists might provoke a rise in the trust accorded to the researcher, implying the possibility of a further double commitment. Or, contrarily, research that ends up shedding light over contradictions and limits of a political movement might cause feelings of rejection, and lead to the closure of previously opened doors for the scholar-activist responsible of such analysis. For what concerns my research, this is surely a risk I am taking by having chosen – initially subconsciously – a dual commitment to both workers' self-management movement and academia. I am in the process of trying to minimise such risk, and the procedure is to be rigorous in my analysis but not fall under a void criticism of my participants, that will add nothing but a useless

stinging voice to the choir, and will surely jeopardise my goal of giving back *useful* knowledge to them.

Being a 'rigorous' scholar-activist is for Borras (2016) one of the most important preconditions I intend to keep relevant throughout the whole analytical process. In his words, *rigorous* means being "thorough, meticulous, precise, careful, and convincing – theoretically, methodologically and empirically" (p.33). Coming back to Burawoy's (1998) definition of sound research as *just* contributing to the growth of knowledge – opposed to an 'objective' solutions of analytical problems[7] -, here we could define rigorousness as providing relevant analyses, which implies being politically aware and thorough, sensitive, informed, nuanced and timely in the contribution. Besides, Borras (2016) insists on the need to take a positioning on the political processes that are being studied, listing this among the prerequisites for an ethical and academic rigorousness. Self-criticism was the force that drove this research from the beginning, and undoubtedly gained momentum as the research grew. Coming back to the methodology utilised, I must concede that rather than sticking to some rigid but accepted principle of the Extended Case Method, I rather became closer to a 'storyteller' and, as Borras suggests, I gradually designed my research around a surfacing yet explicit political positioning, something that Burawoy might have considered less rigorous. In doing so, I eventually tried to become a "researcher-militant" (Colectivo Situaciones 2003).

Finally, Borras (2016) questions what the impact of a scholar-activist research should be. While at academic level, the answer is fairly simple, being the usual production of academically valid material, publications, articles, etc.; at grassroots level the answer becomes tricky. It can be to make some real-life change in the environment studied – although this is rarely feasible and observable – or to be effective in helping the participant consider other perspectives and ultimately framing more convincing arguments for their actions. Whether the 'societal impact' is measurable is a question to be left open, especially referring to this research, being nearly impossible to observe if not after the release of the written material. Even after, this has a chance to emerge only at the

[7] Alinsky on the 'objectivity' of the researcher is fierce as few others, when he passionately cries out that "objectivity, like the claim that one is nonpartisan or reasonable, is usually a defensive posture used by those who fear involvement in the passions, partisanships, conflicts, and the changes that make up life; they fear life" (from his Introduction to the Vintage Edition of the 1946 book "Reveille for Radicals", Alinsky 1969)

stage where feedback is likely to arrive from the participants when they will have access to my readings, as agreed with them. What in truth is the highest hope of this researcher is to take advantage of the dual engagement with both academia and the activists world to embark on a journey that might lead to a progressive learning and dissemination of community organising knowledge and tools. Limited to this research, but still ambitious, is the expectation to carry my own bucket of water and spill it in the river of knowledge, with spreading rings of reverberation, thus effectively contributing to make the Greek workers I encountered more aware of their Argentinian counterparts, and vice versa. Perhaps this might provoke reflections on political directions to take, or maybe – I shall say "more enthusiastically" – it can make these actors acknowledge the *power* they embody, the *agency* they have within their communities, and at what fascinatingly inclusive level of societal organisation they become a driver towards substantial change.

> If we think of revolution not in terms of conquering fortresses and palaces, but in terms of deepening the cracks, the most important question before us is how we can promote the multiplication and convergence of these self-organizational forms" (Grubačić 2016, vi-xvii:xv).

Academics, Sara Motta claims, have to become a 'node' between movements, and take an active role "in the construction of a dialogue between and within movements that results in the development of 'movement' relevant research" (Motta 2011, p.181). Thus, the aim not just to study these autonomies but to contribute, with this analysis, to their reproduction. It is without doubt an extremely hopeful or even utopian aim. Yet, paraphrasing Weber (Howe 1978), the relation between contemporary autonomous organising and the category of hope is one of 'elective affinity'.

3. Subjects of the Research

In the space of this chapter the research, I will introduce the complex mosaic of experiences of autogestión encountered along this journey. Case studies will be presented for what they really are: subjects of this investigation, co-creators of knowledge and anticipatory praxes. I will thus draw participants a recognisable face, while beginning to describe some of their main features and anticipating analytical topics to come.

Although not exhaustive, this chapter should thus serve as guidance and reference through the examination that follows, since it includes all those organisations that opened their doors, allowing me to enter their spaces, while sharing their (labour)time with me. What is arguably even more impressive, they have been eager to engage me in lengthy conversations, to share private and delicate issues, to discuss with me about their successes, failures, limits and achievements, both practical and political. I am deeply grateful to all of them.

The journey of this research began in Athens, Greece. There, among others, I interfaced with Syn Allois, Lacandona and Pagkaki, all part of the network Kolektives. Then I moved to the isle of Crete to meet the members of the Integral Cooperative and Apo Kinou in the city of Heraklion and Halikouti and Tzepeto in Rethymno. I flew back North to the city of Thessaloniki, the second largest in Greece, where I was welcomed by Vio Me. This list is not exhaustive of all the organisations I had the opportunity to meet, as much as the interviews with them do not cover all the meetings conducted. Nevertheless, the above are what I consider to be subjects worth exploring one by one, in more detail. Each of them brings to the research a deep and unique input, and together they contribute to picturing the Hellenic horizon of self-management.

The second part of my field research period was spent in Argentina. The approach to local subjects was different, given that WRCs in Argentina are much more established, known and studied subjects than in Greece. I benefitted from the vast academic literature on them, while focusing more specifically on their interconnections and evolution as a 'movement'. I therefore enhanced my knowledge from key informants, both workers and academics, as well as from written sources. While doing so, I eventually opted for seeking personal access to two different experiences, one being among the most famous WRCs with specific characteristics, Textiles Pigüé, and the other a non-WRC with a clear mission and role within the Argentinian self-organisational movement, the

cooperative La Cacerola. During my stay in Argentina, and continuing my interviews with actors capable of contributing to a broader picture of the evolution of the 'movement', I was also fortunate enough to spend some time frequenting the spaces of the recuperated company Chilavert, of Facultad Abierta and IMPA. At the end of this section, I will necessarily refer to other experiences that, for several reasons, I deemed worth mentioning even when not specifically addressing them as case studies.

While here I will introduce these subjects one by one, what follows will not be an analysis of them as case studies. Instead, the aim is to understand them dynamically, contextually and, more importantly, for their mutual relationships and evolution as 'movement'. Hence, this presentation wants to introduce some of their shared and unique characteristics, but the core element I intend to draw upon are their interrelations. I argue that within their interlockages we can find the seeds of emancipation, the anticipatory spirit, the reconceptualisation of relationships that constitute the backbone of their common transformative project. I do not ask the reader to remember each actor per se, but rather to embrace the alterity they jointly embody as much as the significance of the connections between them and society.

In Greece

Syn Allois and Kolektives

> Solidary economy? No, not the shortest joke. [...] Our economy is going through hard times, we are told, and sacrifices and pain are needed. Across the globe, and especially in our country, we have to work longer and with fewer perks to tolerate unemployment and poverty, to compromise with degradation of social services and environmental destruction. Should we get sick, in short, to "save" the economy? [...] Seven years ago, when the myth of the "strong Greece" and "consumers' welfare" fooled a lot of people, the same question shook a group of people of the association Sporos. Inspired by movements in distant lands, resisting the same forces that today push the Greek society to the limits, we decided to experiment with the practice of alternative and solidarity trade. A trade that, instead of the profit of multinational and local intermediaries, will serve the needs of many: decently rewarding producers, providing access to quality products at the earliest possible affordable price for consumers, guaranteeing a harmonious coexistence with the natural environment. We wanted these pursuits, which often conflict with each other, to be regulated by developing reciprocal relations and the participation of all members [in the decision-making] and not by the "invisible hand of the market". (Syn Allois manifesto, my translation)

Syn Allois (also transcribed Syn.all.ois, pron. "Syn Allis") is a not-for-profit Cooperative for an Alternative and Solidarity Trade formed in 2011 by five members (there were six in 2017). Born out of the expertise gained with the previous organisation Sporos ("the Seed"), Syn Allois "sprang out of the idea of organizing and supporting the growing network of distribution of fair-trade products and solidarity trade in Greece" (Kokkinidis 2015b, p.855).

The cooperative has a shop in the centre of Athens, the centre of their activities of import and distribution of a wide range of products, including Zapatista coffee (Tatawelo), local and international products preferably from small manufacturers. As decided during their internal assemblies, the cooperative refuses to trade with any large supermarkets or with any other economic actor not respecting their political positioning.

Syn Allois can count on its strong ties with small Greek farmers, with whom the price of the products sold by the cooperative is always negotiated. The customer base of Syn Allois "consists solely of individuals and small businesses" (*Ibid.*). Syn Allois, as well as many other Greek organisations here described, has adopted the legal status of the cooperative in order to protect their project, given that in Greece there is no legal recognition for workers' collectives.

The internal organisation of Syn Allois rotates around the assembly, which is "the only organ that formally takes decisions through a consensus-based decision-making model" (*Ibid.*). To frame its strong and explicit political approach, the cooperative has a non-negotiable set of guiding principles, influencing both their objectives and the responsibilities of the members.

Starting from an analysis of the position of Syn Allois' shop in the urban landscape of Athens, it is possible to take note of its features, some of which Syn Allois shares with the experiences that will follow. Exarcheia, a neighbourhood of the Hellenic capital often characterised for its openly anti-establishment attitude[8], could be expected to host several of them. While this area is home to many long-established small workers organisations and squats, none of the experiences here described has its offices there.

[8] As described by Kokkinidis (2014), "Exarcheia is an old district at the heart of Athens and since the students' revolt against the military Junta (1974) has been a place for underground political activism; a stage for activists groups of various social, cultural and political backgrounds (autonomists, feminists, anarchists, extra-parliamentary leftists, ethnic minorities, etcetera) and a laboratory for experimentation" (pp. 868-869).

> Not doing it [opening the shop] in Exarcheia was a conscious decision, because Exarcheia is over-dense politically. We wanted to go to an area not so dense, in the sense that we felt these ideas should be decentralized, in a way, not stay in a central part of the city. I think Pagkaki had the same idea, they wanted to move to different neighbourhoods, so that not everything is in Exarcheia. (Ilias, Syn Allois)

Syn Allois is based in Thissio, a picturesque, central, residential, middle-class neighbourhood of Athens, a few walking minutes away from the Acropolis, the main touristic attraction of the capital. As explained in the words of Ilias, Thissio was chosen not just out of opportunity, but politically as an attempt to expand by contagion the influence of so-called radical political ideas outside the limits of Exarcheia.

Rakopoulos (2014a) observes that, following the recent neoliberal crisis, the capital city of Greece saw the birth of spatial alternatives to austerity, places where alternative or solidarity economy and cooperativism blossomed. Arampatzi (2017) notes that these solidarity structures "act as spaces where alternatives modes of economic conduct and social relations are narrated, imagined and experimented with through everyday practices grounded in neighbourhoods and spanning across the city of Athens and beyond" (p. 2). When answering a question about the relationship between Syn Allois and the apparently politically distant neighbourhood of Thissio, Ilias answered:

> A lot of them [the clients of Syn Allois] are from the neighbourhood, some come from other parts of Athens, [they come to Syn Allois] because they want to buy certain products, but we are established in the neighbourhood, people know about us, we have a very loyal following of people, that understand that we are an alternative, not a normal, business, and they like it. (Ilias, Syn Allois)

The communal dimension that supports the life of experiences such as Syn Allois will be central to the analysis. New social bonds are constituted, and not just in the squares where the protests erupted, but in everyday life. The nature of this bond undermines the neoliberal rationality of austerity (Arampatzi 2014), since the consumer becomes a neighbour, and the neighbour a partner in a common struggle.

Neighbourhood solidarity is an essential part of the survival of Syn Allois, but the cooperative cannot rely merely on local participation, and if one expands the view, it is possible to observe that at city or national level it does not stand alone in the void. On the contrary, Athens is constellated with similar experiences whose radical commitment resonates into one another strengthening their mutualistic resistance. For instance, Syn Allois constituted with two other Athens-based cooperatives – Pagkaki and Lacandona – the network Kolektives.

In their manifesto they summarise the economic situation that led to the birth of workers' collectives.
These, they say, emerged from a collection of people that were either unemployed or dealing with job insecurity. Having to face this unforgiving reality, they decided to try another way of working, namely collective, "with relationships of respect, comradeship and solidarity" (from Kolektives manifesto, my translation).

There are four rules settled by the network. Each of these encapsulates a significant part of the overarching political views they share, and they apply, in their workplaces. It was deemed relevant to report all of them here, since these are the minimum common denominator, at theoretical level, for most of the experiences here described.

> a) We are projects that have, as a main objective, the elimination of hierarchies and inequalities. We operate without shareholders or owners, without bosses, with equal relationships between us both in the organization of work and in the decision-making. This grants the possibility of a rewarding work, based on the principle of "equal pay for equal work", regardless of the parameters that determine wages in the capitalist labour arena, such as age, gender, educational level, powers. The only exceptions relate to cases of colleagues who have greater needs, following the collective decision of all.
>
> b) We are workers, not "cooperative member-owners". All of us who work in collectives are equal members, neither employers nor employees. Our goal is a decent livelihood for our members by providing quality and useful project for the community, and not some "returns of capital". Thus, our projects are not aimed at business profit. If there are financial surpluses, our aim is to socialize them in various ways (i.e. integrating new members, lower selling prices, support respective ventures or self-organized social structures and movements).

> c) We are collectives of people who envision a different world, based on equality and solidarity. A world that fits all, regardless of nationality, gender, sexual orientation, colour and culture. For this reason, we do not tolerate racist, sexist, nationalist or neo-fascist attitudes and opinions. We stand in solidarity and as helpers in social movements that are imbued with the same ideas.
>
> d) We are collective efforts seeking to have a high degree of autonomy from governments, parties, businesses or any other institutional dependencies. Obviously, we do not ignore that we operate within a particular social, political and economic environment, but we try to stand on our own feet, both organisationally and financially, without any dependence in the form of permanent financing by governments, parties, or businesses. (Kolektives manifesto, my translation)

At national level, the main inspirer of workplace autonomy and self-organisation in contemporary Greece is probably the factory Vio Me of Thessaloniki; this will be illustrated in detail further on. Lily, another member of Syn Allois, when intervening at the Panhellenic meeting in Karditsa, stated that her cooperative was among the ones stimulated by the experience of Vio Me, even considering the different nature of the two experiences. She explicitly recognises the utmost importance of a nation-wide network.

> We are a collective of workers that abides by the standards of Vio Me. We have existed since 2011 and we find the notion of a network really important. We have to cooperate, even though we don't agree with other collectives in every topic. It is paramount to create a common base and accept each other. (Lily, Syn Allois, translated)

Within the shop of Syn Allois is possible to find Vio Me products as much as information on the struggles of other co-ops in Athens, together with information on joint events and mutual causes (for instance, the use of alternative currencies). From these bits it is already possible to note how these experiences seem to *naturally* intertwine, support each other, reverberate into one another, defy the logic of competition, all of which contribute to strengthen their projects and allow for their existence.

Lacandona and Pagkaki

Both these organisations belong to the network Kolektives together with Syn Allois. Lacandona and Pagkaki and are partially comparable for their business activities, though they do not share the

same organisational form at legal level. Yet, they belong to the same 'movement', and partake of a substantially identical organisational theory and practice.

The minute space of Lacandona hosts a bar and some shelves where different cooperative products are sold. The workers' collective, which took its name from the Selva Lacandona – the 'home' of Zapatista movement in Chapas, Mexico – can count upon four people who alternate in two shifts. While considering themselves a self-organised group, from a legal perspective Lacandona is a General Partnership (Ομόρρυθμυ Συναιταιρία), closer to a regular business than to a cooperative. The experience started in 2011 and found its place in a central location, a few hundred meters away from Syntagma Square, the administrative and political centre of Athens. The four workers came from an unsatisfactory experience with Fair Trade Hellas[9]. One of them explained to me the origins of Lacandona:

> […] the idea came seven years ago, from three of the four of us – we are still the same four, today. We knew each other from before, since we were working together in an NGO, Fair Trade Hellas … anyway, we had our reasons to quit and all of us were very interested in the idea of solidarity trade. We prefer to call it 'solidarity trade' because unfortunately 'fair trade' can never be 'fair'. I think we are more honest to ourselves if we call it like this. So, we all quit from the NGO and we were unemployed. We decided to start a new project, the way we wanted, the way we believed, having products from small Greek producers and small Greek cooperatives, not just products from the fair trade movement. (Niovi, Lacandona)

Lacandona is infused with one common characteristic of these actors, namely the opposition stance from which the experience is conceived. Whether deriving from owner-workers confrontations (the WRCs), or from a rejection of the current socio-economic model (Syn Allois), opposition is a key factor and an initial indicator of the direction to take. All these subjects were chosen, not by chance, for their decision to open during and against the crisis. The operational choice was then based on rational possibilities.

> We decided to combine it [the sale of cooperative products] with a cafeteria-bar, because it would have been easier for us to sustain. This was just at the beginning of the crisis, so the timing was quite complicated, quite difficult. We had the idea in 2010, but it took us almost one year until we opened the shop. […] We had joined our energies and our interests

[9] Interviews with Fair Trade Hellas were conducted during the field research, but, given its characteristics, the organisation was not considered significant enough to take part in the final analysis.

> in this, but it took us a long time to fight against the bureaucracy and to find this place here. (Niovi, Lacandona).

Opening a self-organised business and dealing with Greek institutions at the peak of the economic crisis was a serious challenge for Lacandona, yet it will be later questioned whether the crisis could be interpreted as the major obstacle or rather as an unexpected ground for creative solutions. Beyond that, from these introductory lines Lacandona appears as a friendship-driven enterprise, while the name suggests a political sense of belonging to an international resistance movement.

> [After a period] D., another friend, joined us. And the idea became to start working on horizontal basis, no external influences, only our project, our thing, and promote these ideas … it was a good thing to do. We wanted to stay here [in Greece], we didn't think about leaving. So, one of the girls had the money and offered it as a start. (Niovi, Lacandona).

The strong will to stay and face the crisis is the first visible element that delineates the profile of this and the other experiences. The risk connected to investing money amid the crisis and involving friends in a hazardous business initiative are left out of the conversation, which may be considered surprising. The proposed interpretation is that such investment must have had two components: the financial and the political. Even when evaluating the operational risks, the political factor seems too predominant. As much as the decision of where to open the self-managed business has not been casual, in a strict similitude with the experience of Syn Allois.

> We were not looking here [close to Syntagma], because we knew that the rents were still high, because it was just the beginning of the crisis. We looked around everywhere, in the centre. We thought about Exarcheia but we also thought it would be better to have a more … central point, where you can find, you can join … a meeting point not just for *us*. Because Exarcheia is very interesting, and it's alive and everything, but there was also a shop like a small co-op there, so we also thought about not wanting to be competitive. (Niovi, Lacandona)

In this choice there is a component of coincidence, but it is accompanied by the political intention of persevering and 'occupying' neighbourhoods previously considered to belong to a different kind of socio-economic world. On the other hand, to choose Exarcheia would have implicitly meant risking becoming self-referential and reinforcing the walls of a powerful yet closed 'bubble'. There is an explicit outreaching attempt underneath the desires of these experiences. Lastly, Niovi mentions the choice not to enter a competition with their peers. This interpretation of competitiveness exemplifies the two elements of the investments: from a financial perspective, it

is feared for risks of failure; from a political point of view, it is unwelcomed being a concept at the antithesis of solidarity.

> For me it is very important to show that it is possible to share and live together, also in a workplace, that a collective way is viable (Niovi, Lacandona). (Merli 2017, p.12)

Pagkaki ("The Bench") is a *kafeneion*, a 'traditional' coffee shop, opened in June 2010 in the neighbourhood of Koukaki, constituted in the legal form of an 'urban co-operative' (Law 1667/1986) which, according to Kioupkiolis and Karyotis (2015, p.12), is "the closest to work collective that is allowed for the Greek law". A *kafeneion* is a form of Greek cafeteria that was particularly widespread in the Greek countryside in the past, within the villages, carrying the double meaning of a place to drink and to perform 'public activities' (Lagos 2008). In a *kafeneion* it was thus possible to have a moment of concertation between citizens, which infers at "doing politics" (πολιτική). The members of Pagkaki opted to open a business in line with the traditional principles of the *kafeneion* precisely to recuperate its socio-political meaning, whilst adjourning it to the *zeitgeist* of contemporary austerity.

> Our aim was to interact with people, [...] to bring forth the idea of self-management and autonomy in the workplace, and we wanted to try to make these alternative ways of organizing accessible to those people outside the project and not only between ourselves or our comrades, who more or less share the same ideas. We then began to think whether we should open a coffee shop at Exarcheia that would have been our natural space and where we would have been much more comfortable from the beginning, since we would have been surrounded by friends and like-minded people; or to go to another area and try to make it accessible to the people that ... . (Pagkaki 3)
> [another member intervened and added]
> Exarcheia is full of places that organize various events and release pamphlets, but here you create a space where someone will see a poster or a brochure that wouldn't normally be seen in the area and so they become exposed to different ideas, an alternative logic. (Pagkaki 1)
> (Kokkinidis 2015b, p.859)

Koukaki, the central neighbourhood where the cafeteria is based, is known for being home of a pleasant nightlife, good restaurants and traditional music, near the historic district of Plaka. The choice to open Pagkaki here is fundamentally in line with Syn Allois and Lacandona, trying to 'invade' spaces of the city not traditionally considered related to anti-austerity resistance. The origins of the workers' collective suggest a deeper interconnection with other urban experiments

of resistance and relations of cause-effect with the crisis of 2008-11. Significantly, Pagkaki shares its roots with Syn Allois.

> Pagkaki, as the idea of a working collective, was born in 2008. A group of people who participated in the cooperative for alternative and solidarity trade Sporos started then preparing to create a livelihood-political venture. After two whole years, in 2010, we began to give a physical form to what we dreamed of. In practice, we must try establishing conditions of equal relations both in the organization of work and in decision-making, and to try to be economically viable under these circumstances, away from logic that adopts business profit. (Intervention of the workers of Pagkaki at the II Euromediterranean Meeting, my translation)

The partisan approach of the cafeteria is not limited to being a centre for meetings and proposals, but includes an attempt at community outreach with the publication of pamphlets and promotion of events, live shows, presentations (Kokkinidis 2015b, 847-871). Transparency is considered crucial for them, hence the publication of internal reports, such as Pentachronia Pagkaki – 5 years of Pagkaki (2014) fully accessible from their website.

Interviews were conducted in Lacandona, whereas for Pagkaki the preference was to rely on observations and informal talks. This operational choice was made knowing Pagkaki has been under the spotlight of several researchers, activists and sympathisers causing an apparent over-exposition[10]. The reason for this might be that Pagkaki has been pictured, for its known story and diffused political statements, as the 'anti-austerity coffee shop' in Greece, as much as Vio Me symbolises factory recuperation in Europe. Still, while Vio Me is unique in its nature amid Greek experiences of resistance, Pagkaki is one among many cafeterias that considered rediscovering the ancient *kafenion* in a clear socio-political move. Therefore, another interviewer approaching them might have been perceived as too intrusive. Furthermore, Pagkaki released tens of reports and communications, while authors such as Kokkinidis (2012; 2015a; 2017) and Rakopoulos (2014b;

10 The accuracy of this perception was confirmed during further meetings with members of Pagkaki, particularly during the III Euromediterranean Meeting in April 2019. The workers of the collective present at the meeting were welcoming and glad to discuss informally this research's findings, as well as to provide insightful feedbacks. At the same time, they recalled of many researchers who had approached them and eventually misinterpreted their intentions and published material which, according to them, was not faithful to the interviews (for instance, they mentioned a research considering Pagkaki a product of a gentrification process).

2014c; 2016) analyse the experience in depth. In this unique case, observations and talks were thus considered enough to integrate with the already existing relevant material.

The Integral Cooperative of Heraklion (ICH) and Apo Kinou

Syn Allois, Lacandona and Pagkaki are all based in Athens, at the centre of the Greek urban and administrative life, in close contact with the government and in proximity to Syntagma Square, of deep significance in 2011.

The isle of Crete lies about 200 miles away from Piraeus, the ancient port of Athens, recently liberalised and sold to private investors during the austerity manoeuvres[11]. Crete is the largest and most populous among the thousands of Greek Islands, and a major settlement in the heart of the Mediterranean Sea. Home of the Minoan culture – the earliest known civilisation in Europe – the island saw an alternation of conquerors throughout its history, interrupted by a brief state of independency from 1898 to 1913. Although the Cretan State was short-lived, the desire to cease with relations of subalternity seems to continue to be intrinsic among the Cretan population, while expressed in a more complex and delicate balance with institutions.

Heraklion, Chania and Rethymno, the three major cities of the island, have been afflicted by the economic crisis in a comparable degree to mainland centres. Nonetheless, due to their peculiar socio-economic history and culture, dissimilarities on the range of reactions to the crisis are here noticeable. The primary reason to investigate workplace resistance in Crete was thus to broaden the perspective outside the Capital city and question the breadth of possibilities of Greek autogestión.

The unexpected outcome of this section of the investigation was that, by and large, Cretan experiences seemed to react to austerity measures with higher doses of creativity, extensive use of local resources, and greater hope. The first two Cretan organisations presented are active in the administrative capital and largest centre, Heraklion, a vibrant Mediterranean community.

[11] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/27/greece-trade-battleground-foreign-investors-swoop

The Integral Cooperative of Heraklion (also abbreviated ICH) is in fact a self-managed umbrella organisation run by volunteers or part-time members. Their initiative aims, in brief, are "networking and strengthening self-management projects that seek to overcome the main, centralised and repressive economic system"[12]. Therefore, they sustain and help connecting the radical cooperatives present on the island, both between themselves and with other Greek and international actors. The ICH originated from a previous organisational platform, as is the case for many self-organised experiences.

> I was involved in a political movement during the crisis here in Greece, it's named Platforma. It was a political movement yet mainly theoretical. Platforma was trying to deal with the problems of direct democracy and how people can regain power in order to manage things by themselves … but it stopped there, we couldn't see how to implement all these beautiful ideas. By that time, we learned about the call for an 'Integral Revolution' that came from Spain. (Michalis, Integral Cooperative of Heraklion)

When looking for a shape in which they could enclose their political theories, the members of the ICH found a 'model' coming from another umbrella organisation, the Catalan Integral Cooperative (CIC), that they took into serious consideration, eventually adopting the same name. In the next chapters there will be a reflection on the 'integral revolution', while here it is possible to briefly consider what was put into practice. The main program of the ICH rotates around a local 'autonomous street market' and focuses on alternative currencies.

In November 2016 they called for an open assembly to launch the first 'autonomous street market' of the city, to provide a space of direct encounter between producers and consumers that abide by a logic of independence in their economic activities. Beyond the organisation of the assembly, the main contribution of the ICH was the introduction of the 'Kouki', a local currency to use alongside FairCoin (a decentralised cryptocurrency, present all over Greece[13]) and the Euro.

Combining a quite radical approach with a rather pragmatic program, the ICH succeeded in replicating the autonomous street market and achieved a significant diffusion in the use of Kouki in Heraklion. The tactic of progressive social inclusion and slow diffusion of the alternative currencies can be interpreted as an effective and careful form of community outreach. The

[12] https://cooperativas.gr/?page_id=10

[13] https://fair-coin.org/en

sensibility to the argument of 'autonomy' by the local population has probably given it weight as well.

The members of the ICH proactively organise business activities such as the street market, whose provisional nature does not prevent them from being economically relevant. Furthermore, the ICH is internally organised in a self-managed and horizontal way, it is in strict relations with analogous workplace experiences and serves as a point of practical and theoretical 'reverberations' of the self-organisational ethics.

Apo Kinou ("together") is a recently established workers' cooperative with a *kafeneion* in the city centre of Heraklion and 300 hectares of land cultivated collectively in the urban outskirts. The meeting with Michalis of the ICH took place at a dinner table at Rovythi ("the chickpea"), the bar of Apo Kinou collective.

Apo Kinou began as an informal project of friends who hoped to resist the crisis by emancipating themselves, cultivating their pieces of land, collectivising and selling their products through their acquaintances. Today the members of Apo Kinou describe themselves as "a cooperative sustainable community"[14] and Rovythi became a bar/*kafeneion* in the picturesque city centre of Heraklion, selling their products (such as mustard and oil) and serving falafel and drinks to its clients.

> In the beginning it was just a thing we decided among friends … "let's be all together and harvest all our fields together, and then share the profit". So we said, we are 5 farmers in total, 3 of us have some fields, we put them together and worked on them to produce oil. My mother is from Germany, so we used to send our oil to people there. But since it was without a legal form, we started fearing the risks connected to this. We thought of how we could transform this, that we were doing unofficially, in a legal form. A form that could be a tool for us. (worker of Apo Kinou)

The member of Apo Kinou that joyfully described their experience while in the mid of his routine – the interview stopped and restarted several times – tackled straightaway a pivotal point of this investigation: the use of the cooperative form as a 'legal box'. Some experiences had to adopt it to become recognisable by the market – to sell their products – or by the State – to have assistance and benefit from institutional support (De Peuter and Dyer-Witheford 2010). In the case of Apo

[14] http://www.apokinou.gr/en/rovithi

Kinou, they opted to commerce informally for a while, and then decided it was necessary to register their organisation not to incur into sanctions.

> We opened this place [Rovythi] in December 2016, while Apo Kinou as a group is 4 years old. We still have the lands where we work, and there is the working group of the producers. Now we are producing our mustard, and aim to make it legally. Because until now we did it at small scale, at home … so if someone [the financial police] comes now, here at the shop, where we sell the mustard we make … the place where we make it is *super* as it should be, but it does not have any paper! (worker of Apo Kinou)

A form of economic disobedience is certainly taken into account by Apo Kinou and its members. Yet what strikes more of this description is that he rates their mustard being "as it should be" much more important than being 'legal', disqualifying the concept of lawful 'market' as such. On their website, they write "We don't use additives and chemicals. So our raw materials are pure, healthy and delicious. They are also seasonal (don't complain if you don't find something you love and it is not of the time)[14]"

Apo Kinou and its physical urban space Rovythi rely on strong theoretical foundations, but their practical interpretation of autonomy, self-management and, even beyond that, their sense of justice in a context filled with legally forced implementations of economic impositions is certainly worth exploring.

Halikouti and Tzepeto

> 'Self-organization', 'autonomy', 'horizontal structure' … these terms we hear more and more often in Greece inspired a group of young people in Rethymno to create 'Beyiri', a co-op grocery store. A reminder that the economic crisis doesn't bring only negative effects, but also new ideas and solutions, new perceptions of life and working conditions, new forms of organization and lifestyle choices[15].

Rethymno is possibly the crown jewel of Crete, with a magnificent old town and the scenic Fortezza, the ancient citadel. The social and economic rhythm imposed by the leisure industry is palpable, and most of the crisis survival businesses rely on the inflow of sightseers in the high season, in view of the winter shortages. Compared to the fast pace of Athens, Rethymno appears

[15] https://cretazine.com/en/crete/crete-life/cretan-tales/item/1228-beyiri-cooperative-groceries-in-rethymnon

less likely to show signs of emergent economic guerrilla tactics. If an unconventional analogy is conceded, such unpredictable outcome of the crisis recalls an old punk rock anecdote. When talking about how punk is all about the urgency of expression against an unjust world – in fact not that distant from self-management – a UK based punk band complained about punk rock having exploded in California: "we have the grey skies of London, the mines, the factories and the queen, they have sunny beaches and surf … what are they angry for, exactly?" (Guglielmi 1997, my translation). Yet, as the violent and destructive Black Flag expressed pure determination of rebelling to the status quo under the sun of California, the resistant and pragmatic workers' collectives of Rethymno prove strong antidotes to the crisis can be found in the most unexpected place. Under the surface of the same old touristic Crete, the crisis hit deep and awoke hidden wishes.

The first initiative to take root was a grocery. The collective Halikouti opened Beyiri ("the horse") in 2013, located on the ancient road climbing up to the Fortezza, the pedestrian Katehaki street. The collective behind the project described in a few lines their timely and straightforward objectives: self-management as the means, overturning the crisis as the end. The latter is in fact both a blessing and a curse: a local economic initiative practicing autonomy might be a powerful resource and an example for citizens and activist; yet, due to its extremely circumscribed action on the scale of the Greek society, saying its impact is utopian would be euphemistic[16]. What this workers' collective had in mind was to address the crisis at the level of the self, precisely where the calamity hit most. 'Overturning the crisis' became, in practice, 'overturning *their* crisis', equivalating the levels where the crisis attacks and where, they realised, it was possible to defend and react.

The core principle of Beyiri was to "build a greater degree of autonomy, one step at a time" (see note 15). Its explicative sign is a horse holding the stick and eating the carrot at the tip, rejecting the logic of punishment and "any illusion of reward" (*Ibid.*). Beyiri surges from the need for decent working conditions combined with the desire to trade eco-friendly, good quality products, such as organic wine, rice, dried fruits, handmade natural cosmetics and more. The group behind Beyiri

[16] Kokkinidis expands the argument in his paragraph titled "Size matter (?)" (Kokkinidis 2012).

named itself 'Halikouti', and when they decided to open a *kafeneion* they gave the place the same name.

> In July 2012 we founded Halikouti collective, and about eight months after, officially in March 2013, we opened Beyiri, the grocery. We were the same cooperative. It was a mix of friends but basically … the working relations, there were friend relations between the members, but mainly there were comrade[ship] relations because we knew each other from 'the streets'. (W1) And we embraced each other, we were quite politically involved … but then we had to close down the grocery because we couldn't manage it, and we opened the *kafeneion*. (W2) (W1 and W2 are both workers of Halikouti).

For a short period of time, before eventually realising the grocery was unsustainable, the two projects co-existed, both registered under the same cooperative. The experience of the workers' collective of Halikouti, initially with the grocery and then with the *kafeneion*, has been paradigmatic for Rethymno, inspiring the constitution of other collectives who decided to embark on a hard journey to economic subsistence and social resistance.

> Q. Before you were in some other project, cooperative or collective?
> A. There was no collective here (W1).
> Halikouti was the first (W2).
> We have been the driving members behind local collective initiatives (W1).

The collective Tzepeto (from "Mastro Geppetto" of The Adventures of Pinocchio) formed shortly after and organised two main initiatives: they opened Kalouba, a 'game café' located a few meters away from Halikouti, just below the gates of the Fortezza; and launched Tzepeto itself, a workshop for puppetry and puppet theatre, hosted in the spaces of Kalouba.

> Tzepeto started in 2014, the main idea was [to have] a place where people could make toys from scraps […]. Two French guys had the idea, they already used to do it in France, it was called Kaluba, they still exist. And they found a group of people here, in Rethymno, and they said 'ok, let's try this, let's stay together'. (Worker of Tzepeto)

A strong component of community outreach is evident in Tzepeto, since its activities include performances, seminars, events and creative moments of encounter for the collectively. The cooperative has a large open-air space for food consumption, while the more creative part of its proposal takes places mainly indoors. On a legal level, Tzepeto is a Sineterismos (Συνεταιρισμός) (see Merli 2017).

Tzepeto's and Halikouti's cafeterias are a few meters away from each other, but there was a rational choice behind the different commodities offered. While Halikouti preferred to establish a

traditional *kafeneion* with its tiny coffee table in a condensed space apt for interactions, Tzepeto occupies a larger area with restaurant tables under umbrellas. Beside Greek coffee, Halikouti proposes equally traditional drinks, such as raki and tsipouro. Tzepeto insists more on aperitifs, snacks or light lunches. Rather than being a mere commercial choice, this unequal offer has been discussed and planned between the two groups. Even beyond that, it came from an accurate analysis of the community's needs. Tzepeto has been greatly influenced by the radical proposal of Halikouti, as much as the latter acknowledged the importance of Athens based collectives such as Pagkaki or Syn Allois, with whom they are in close relations. Travelling to Crete, it became noticeable how a 'chain of reverberations' was in place, connecting distant self-managed experiences and carrying a message of creative resistance to austerity.

Vio Me

The focus of this whole investigation is, as explained, on the processes and politics of self-management and self-organisation as an exit strategy against the crises. In Argentina, these can be preferably observed in what became their 'natural environment', or the Workers Recuperated Companies. Still, any direct comparison with Greece is likely to fail on these premises: given the more recent impact of the crisis, the different socio-economic organisation of the country, and the dissimilar legal framework, the phenomenon of WRCs barely took root in the Hellenic scenario. Nevertheless, I argue, different kinds of cooperative workplaces absorbed and reinterpreted self-management ethics and practices, and where thus enlisted among the subject of this investigation.

The only major exception is Vio Me, a fully-fledged WRC, that slowly gained visibility to become the Greek or even European symbol of a workers-driven counteroffensive against the calamitous austerity measures. Today, the workers in self-management of Vio Me are often present at many international events to testify, raise support for their struggle, and strengthen their network.

Before the crisis, the factory was part of the industrial group Philkeram-Johnson, which opened the establishments in the outskirts of Thessaloniki in 1982. Intriguingly, from 2000 to 2006 Vio Me was listed among the twenty most profitable industries in Northern Greece[17], manufacturing different

[17] http://www.greeknewsagenda.gr/index.php/topics/culture-society/6464-viome-a-succesfull-example-of-workers-control

types of building materials and tile glues. The first signs of instability were seen in 2010, not long after the US-born financial crisis had been transformed into austerity measures and a massive public debt for Europe, with a tsunami effect on the Greek economy. Employees' payrolls began to be delayed, then to cease completely in May 2011, when Philkeram-Johnson filed for bankruptcy, firing more than 70 employees.

Thedoros Karyotis reported for the website Worker's Control[18] what happened then. "Forty of its workers, organised horizontally in a primary workers' union, occupied the factory [...] to prevent the employers from taking away the machinery before paying the workers the nearly 1.5 Million Euros owed in salaries and compensations. After one year of unfruitful contacts with the Ministry of Labour and the central trade unions, the workers of Vio Me announced in July 2012 their intention of self-managing production in the occupied factory, with the slogan: if you can't do it, we can" (*Ibid.*).

Vio Me was just one among the many companies that succumbed during the deep recession, yet the only recuperated factory that still stands today in Greece. There are many reasons for this, primarily the impressive quantity and quality of solidarity initiatives the workers were able to raise. The recuperation of Vio Me brought to the creation of an extensive international network of support, mainly in Europe, while the cooperative was filmed for the documentary "Occupy, Resist, Produce" by Dario Azzellini and Oliver Ressler (2014), and entered the conversations on austerity and resistance, both at scholarly and activists levels, as a protagonist.

> We are the workers of Vio Me, of the occupied factory in Greece, in a struggle for 6 years to have the right to produce. Six years since the owner abandoned it and left us unpaid and without any right to compensation. The union of the workers who was already working internally without any hierarchy decided to stay inside and restart the production by any means necessary. We stay faithful to this decision and we have been fighting for six years to make a creative recuperation (introduction of a worker of Vio Me at the VI Encuentro)

The workers' collective behind the recuperation set from the very beginning the principles for Vio Me to become a just workplace and a centre of solidarity, both outgoing and incoming. Years of experience matured within the Greek labour society in struggle were cleverly complemented by

[18] http://www.workerscontrol.net/authors/viome-workers-control-greek-crisis

practical insights and tools coming from overseas. The workers found a direct source of inspiration and support in FaSinPat Zanón, the self-managed ceramic tile factory located in the Southern Argentinian province of Neuquén. Delegations from FaSinPat landed in Thessaloniki and helped the workers of Vio Me to shape their organisational identity and procedures, impacting on their tactics and strategies of economic survival and social resistance.

> From the workers of FaSinPat Zanón we learned so much, thanks to their formidable experience. We came to the conclusion that the capital is surely the same everywhere, but so is the working class! Moreover, our overseas comrades gave us insights on how to avoid problems they had to face more than a decade ago, when they had just occupied the factory (worker of Vio Me, form my interview for WOTS?[19]).

What were these teachings and the best-practices the delegation of FaSinPat brought to Greece? In a nutshell, self-management, or better autogestión, in its more incisive Spanish version. Rather than being purely operational, this kind of self-management is at the core of a more profound revolution of the self, of the workers' community and the world around them. Practices and theories go hand in hand as recounted by the Greek workers.

> [We have been] working all these years in the same way, with direct democracy, with assemblies – the place where we decide what and how to produce, and even the strategies on how the struggle has to continue. […] [We changed everything] including our system of production, subverting the idea of specialisation and favouring a system of rotation that allows us to rediscover our abilities. What we produce we are able to export, and this keeps the factory alive with its social dimension, open to all the people. (worker of Vio Me, VI Encuentro)

In this initial statement at the VI Workers' Economy Gathering in Argentina, the member of Vio Me does not separate the productive aspects and challenges to the social goals of the factory. The two are intertwined, also describable as rotating arrows: they were able to restart their chain of production and build their clientele thanks to incoming solidarity and networking with their peers; they can thus keep the factory alive and seek for further solidarity.

A common feature of all the experiences here listed is, nevertheless, the precarity. The unconventional economic and legal road they took is the main reason for their fragility, that might seriously hamper their emancipatory desires and capacity. That Vio Me stands upon quicksand –

[19] http://wots.eu/2016/03/24/vio-me-una-fabbrica-recuperata-nella-grecia-dellausterita/

for their uncertain legal position and their ceaseless difficulties for the production – is made clear on every occasion, with two objectives: feed the flow of solidarity; and push their peers to raise the level of the challenge. The latter is the only long-term strategy to reinforce their position. Vio Me workers are straightforward when addressing their problems and the proposed solutions both at national level and on international stages.

> Problems: 1. Obtaining a legal licence for the factory; 2. Lack of networking – markets without intermediaries need to show signs of practical solidarity, participation, co-organisation; 3. Funding – we all have to say no to funding from banks and the State. A bank or a fund of collectives should be created; 4. Law for markets without intermediaries. We have to press the governments and make some suggestions. […] (worker of Vio Me at the Panhellenic Meeting, translated).

Today the recuperated company of Vio Me produces a new range of environmental-friendly cleaning products, relatively easy to finance, and produced using local and natural ingredients, to be distributed through their network of markets without intermediaries and on their online shop. Their basin of solidarity is impressive, counting 6.000 people that attended the benefit concert organised on the February 12, 2013, that followed three days of intense mobilisation and allowed the production to restart. In April 2014 the workers formed a Social Cooperative Enterprise, yet their legal status is precarious and disputes over the ownership of the plant are continuing.

In the director's note of "Next Stop: Utopia"[20], a documentary about Vio Me, Apostolos Karakassis summarises the outstanding achievements and the inevitable setbacks. "Workers with no work experience outside the production line, driven by despair, decided to start a small revolution, just for a chance to win back their lives. They want to establish an island of utopia in a capitalist environment and of course they meet a thousand obstacles and conflicts at every level. They are going against the law, the judicial authorities and the factory's ex-owners, while they fight to gain some kind of legal status. There are conflicts within the group as well; practicing direct democracy can be very hard. But what proves to be the hardest, is the inner conflicts each individual has to

[20] http://www.nextstoputopia.com/

face. These people in their fifties[21] are forced to develop a new identity, one that will allow them to survive in dignity and withstand the sufferings of an 'outrageous fortune'" (*Ibid.*).

Workers Medical Centre in Vio Me

Vio Me is without any doubt a paradigmatic experience of self-management in Europe after the financial crisis of 2008. Its distinctiveness does not mean uniqueness, as proven by the self-recognised inclusion of the factory's workers in a wider struggle, a broader history and a larger network of 'peers'. Yet, some characteristics of this experience are unquestionably exceptional, since they are the only self-managed experience to host, within their walls, another self-managed experience, with whom they collaborate.

The Workers Medical Centre in Vio Me (hereafter abbreviated to 'Vio Me Clinic') is a self-managed, anti-hierarchical, and autonomous entity, operating on the basis of direct democracy and providing primary care with a holistic and integrated approach, with a peculiar attention to working conditions. This is, paraphrased, their presentation and statement of intentions. The building where the Clinic operates is among the ones the workers of Vio Me decided to recuperate[22], thus the medical team is in close contact with the workers, in an unprecedented case of immediate availability and preparedness for working-related injuries. However, the Clinic originated outside the factory, since the group that later opened inside Vio Me was behind the Social Solidarity Medical Centre of Thessaloniki. Dimitra recapitulates the story from the Medical Centre to the Vio Me Clinic as well as the needs from which the two surged, in a vehement yet accurate recap.

> The Clinic has been created in 2016, in the perspective that for us people there is no solution any more than to take the health (and the work) in our hands. This is because after six years of neoliberalism in Greece we experienced 30% unemployment, 3 million people excluded

[21] Since the recuperation occurred, and throughout the years, the original group that occupied and sparked self-management was progressively, but partially, replaced by younger workers that adhered to the cause. These new members appear to be as capable as their predecessors to keep the flight of autonomy high as well as the factory alive.

[22] The ownership of the plant after its recuperation is a complex and evolving story: in brief, a part of the original factory owned by Philkeram-Johnson is still property of the multinational, while another section has been fully occupied by the workers of Vio Me, which then utilise some of the warehouses for their new production of cleaning products while others may be used for conferences, meetings, stockage or even, as in this case, to host other organisations.

> from the health care system, with an untouchable private system, with hospitals closed and primary health care (already not so well developed) that had degraded, workers' rights fucked, and society in a depredation state. We had an increase in illnesses and deaths, and not even all of them have been registered. A generalised poverty that has continued until today, even if it is not in the media so much anymore. The Workers Medical Centre has been created by the connection of two self-managed initiatives: Vio Me – self-managed in the production, and the Social Solidarity Medical Centre of Thessaloniki – self-managed for health. Two ventures, co-existing in the same city and advancing in parallel. And both of them started their history in 2011. (Dimitra, Workers Medical Centre in Vio Me at the VI Encuentro).

The workers of Vio Me participate in the assembly of the Clinic to provide an effective connection between work and self-managed healthcare. The holistic and integral approach is a fascinating reinterpretation of autonomy and solidarity in the key of health. The patient becomes *participant* from their entrance to the structure. He/she is welcomed by the therapeutic unit, which explains how they will co-address the issues. The unit is composed of mixed medical figures: medics, psychologists, and nurses, who join their specialisations to deal with all the aspects of the cure simultaneously. The interaction of these professionals and their relation to the participant on the same level leads to a holistic anamnesis producing a personal medical record. The objective is to tackle the issue at every level and even in a pre-emptive form, while the record allows the participant to decide whether to have his/her examinations in the laboratory of the Clinic or at his/her social security centre.

The motto of the Workers Medical Centre in Vio Me is "Take healthcare in our hands. If they cannot, we can". Self-management reverberated outside and within the walls of Vio Me, causing the convergence of two experiences that, apart from the nature of each job, share almost every aspect of this political utopia in action.

In Argentina

Textiles Pigüé

Pigüé is a small town of nearly 14,000 inhabitants in the province of Buenos Aires, about 600km away from the Capital City. It was founded by migrants from the south of France in the late XIX century. Ruggeri (2014) writes that probably the French settlers instilled their cooperative tradition into their new environment.

Observing the area of Pigüé on a map, three main elements are immediately noticeable, beside the town itself. The first visible element is a grey shape on the right indicating the aerodrome. On the left side of the town, the National Route 33 connecting the far distant Rosario to Bahia Blanca, separates the urban environment from the 'outskirts' of Pigüé. Crossing the National Route, we find the military base of the Mechanised Regiment N.3, and, lastly, the so-labelled 'industrial park'. The latter is, in fact, the whole complex of Textiles Pigüé.

This aerial perspective is a snap-shot of post-colonial Argentinian history to nowadays: a European migrants' settlement, built from scratch in a perfect small-scale replication of Buenos Aires or any other Argentinian city; the successive industrial development of the area, with a textile factory ideally absorbing the labour force offered by the surroundings; the striking proximity of the military base symbolising State control *over* the town and recalling memories of the painful dictatorship years. Nevertheless, whilst the factory still stands on the map, what is not visible from above is the nature of the change occurred in 2004, nor the impact it had on the town of Pigüé and beyond.

The businessman Eduardo Bakchillian opened the textiles and clothing factory Gatic S.A. in 1981, transforming the small town of Pigüé into an industrial hub. In the following twenty years, Gatic Pigüé became a factory with an intense productive rhythm and strict labour discipline (*Ibid.,* p.23). At its peak, the middle of the 90s, the factory had 500 employees. This decade, for Argentina, coincides with the implementation of an aggressive kind of neo-liberalism by the government of Menem, provoking rapid growth followed by sudden financial dissolution. In 1998, the employees of Gatic S.A. went on strike for three consecutive weeks protesting the recession caused by the reforms of Menem. *Piquetes* (pickets) blocked the National Route 33 for days.

The long wave of Argentina's economic collapse in 2001 reached the town of Pigüé, impacting on the factory and resulting in massive layoffs and substantial cuts in production. Amid the sudden decadence, the workers of Gatic Pigüé did not stand still, in fact seeking inspiration from their peers facing identical difficulties in Buenos Aires, in Cordoba and in Rosario. In 1998, the metallurgic factory IMPA in Buenos Aires had been occupied, then converted into a cooperative, and had become fully managed by its former employees. In the year 2000, the closure of another metallurgic factory, Gip Metal in Avellaneda, brought about the first legal expropriation of the establishment by its own workers. While distant and dissimilar, these examples instilled faith in the

workers of Gatic S.A. convincing them to stand together and try to save both their jobs and their factory.

Between 2002 and 2004, when the recuperation began, the workers had to deal with an extremely unstable situation, affecting both their finances and their private lives. Gustavo Koprivica, one of them, said "it came a time when every Friday seven or eight persons were fired" (*Ibid.,* p.34, my translation). The first to be left home became the most active, while reaching a total of 220 by September 2003. Gatic in Pigüé never officially shut down, it simply left its workers in the streets, with their hopes to be reintegrated, while in truth the factory had already ceased its production. The unions, marginal actors of this story for their inactivity up to this point, recommended the workers to stay quiet and trust their negotiation efforts for the lost wages to be refunded. Officially, the only strategy was to wait for the arrival of a new investor. Instead, the MNER arrived in Pigüé.

The National Movement of Recuperated Companies (*Movimiento Nacional de Empresas Recuperadas*) was founded in 2000, as one of the first attempts to group different WRCs of Argentina, make them visible, and fight for their rights. The MNER originated from the meeting held in the metallurgic factory La Baskonia, in La Matanza on September 7, 2002, organised by two factories seeking nationalisation of their establishments under workers' control: Ceramica Zanón and Brukman (Ruggeri, 2014a). The story of the unified MNER did not last long, since one of its main exponents, Luis Caro, left in January 2003 to give birth to the MNFRT (*Movimiento Nacional de Fábricas Recuperadas por sus Trabajadores*), more orientated towards seeking legal solutions for the workers rather than political outcomes (Fishwick 2018). The two other souls of the MNER, Eduardo Murúa and José Abelli guided the movement until, in 2004, its relevance began to fade due to idiosyncrasies regarding the politics of the government, headed by Néstor Kirchner (Ruggeri 2014a).

Still, in 2002 the movement which had already adopted the Brazilian MST motto "Occupy, resist, produce!" (*Ibid.*, p.59) and was by then representing about eighty WRCs, landed in Pigüé with its main representatives (Ruggeri, Andrés and others 2014, p.36). The workers gave a lukewarm reception to the MNER, given the high mistrust they had learned to set aside for unions and representatives of any kind. Despite the initial difficulties, the meeting was crucial to instil in them the idea of forming a cooperative, through which it was possible, according to the MNER, to recuperate the factory. The massive assembly held in December 2003 with most of the 200 workers

of Gatic agreed on an extraordinary resolution: to occupy the factory (*Ibid*., p.37). The next step would have been to form a cooperative.

Those who first entered the locked establishments found some elements had disappeared, including: work protocols, archives, 56,000 needles, and more. Moreover, there was no electricity, nor water, nor gas. Raw materials were lacking as well, and the hope to restart the production in such a complex situation seemed unrealistic. Fabián *Pitu* González, one of the workers, remembers: "We got into the plant and we felt it belonged to us, like a treasure [...]. For a year, the only thing we did was to preserve that treasure" (*Ibid.*, p.37).

The story of Textiles Pigüé, insofar as circumscribed, has been told in countless occasions by its own members, by academics and by activists. At first glance there is no comparison, in terms of length and density, with the Greek experiences described before. There are gaps in terms of years of experience, knowledge acquired, self-recognition, size and public visibility among others. Still, their proposal is epistemologically identical to the Greek one, even if reproduced in incomparable working environments.

It can be argued that more recently recuperated factories in Europe, such as Vio Me, still embody a creative power and an emancipatory potential that for Textiles Pigüé and other Argentinian WRCs has perhaps softened. Another possible interpretation is that the uncompromising attitude of Vio Me could not have permitted experiences such as Textiles Pigüé to resist and continue their journey until today. Pablo Peláez of Facultad Abierta observed that this recuperated factory has unique characteristics amidst the Argentinian WRCs, such as their interactions with the government, the regional institutions and other local actors. While fully embodying the spirit of a WRC, Textiles Pigüé brings elements of discrepancy worth analysing. This was the reason why I chose to conduct interviews and observations there.

La Cacerola

> "It is called 'La Cacerola' ["saucepan"] because the hunger, the necessity for food, was an extremely urgent need in those times, and also because during those moments – luckily – we had *cacerolazos*. The mobilizations managed to unify the most submerged popular sectors with the middle class that had lost, had seen its savings confiscated, and got them together for what were then called *cacerolazos*. From that, from that process, this cooperative sprung. We had to go through many terrible years of shortage, and everything you see here we built it by ourselves". (Silvia, La Cacerola, my translation)

The night between December 19 and 20, 2001, Buenos Aires erupted. During those days, the president was Fernando De La Rua, who came last in a sequence of neoliberal projects and workers repression attempts perpetrated from the military government (1976-83) to Carlos Menem's decade (1989-99). Years of mounting inequality and growing disillusionment with established parties culminated after the government's declaration of a State of Siege (Ozarow and Croucher 2014). In an iconic image, the helicopter carrying De La Rua abandoned the roof of the *Casa Rosada* (The House of Government), while a gigantic concentration of citizen was occupying the whole of Plaza de Mayo and the surrounding streets. The day was December 21, shortly after the Capital of Argentina had exploded in a *scream* of denial (Holloway 2014) in the form of a spontaneous pots-and-pans protest, the so-called *cacerolazo*.

According to Goddard (2006), this form of rebellion originated outside Argentina, namely in Chile, widely used to protest the dictatorship of Pinochet in the late seventies. Burchianti (2004) argues that the politically prominent Mothers of Plaza de Mayo – whose sons and daughters had been detained, tortured and murdered by the militaries during the dictatorship, and their nephews abducted – played a role in bridging generation gaps through the politics of memory, thus connecting the strategies and significance of the protests of yesterdays to the ones of today. As anticipated above, December 2001 and what came after cannot be understood in their entirety without grasping the profound wounds of Argentina originated in 1976 (Ruggeri, Andrés 2014a). At the same time, the organisational forms emerging in the years that followed have a longer and more deeply rooted history that does not simply begin on the night of December 19.

Another fundamental strategy of resistance throughout the last decades in Argentina were the pickets across the major routes of the vast country. Its protagonists were the *piqueteros*, a movement of unemployed whose major goal was to force the institutions to care about them and provide.

> It was a very strong movement in the *conurbano bonaerense*[23] [...], as well as widespread in the countryside. There, unemployment grew enormously, and a movement of the unemployed began to surge, demanding public policies from the government. Those were the *piqueteros*. On the other hand, the saucepan rapidly became the symbol of the urban. "*Piquete y cacerola, la lucha es una sola*" ['Picket and pan, the struggle is the same'] was the chant on the streets. (Silvia, La Cacerola, my translation)

The energy of both urban and rural movements, cultivated through years of sufferance and underground resistance, merged in Plaza de Mayo. Its intensity did not abate after De La Rua fled the country, instead it mutated into a self-organised constructive flow, lucidly capable of examining the roots of the problems and to address them creatively. Ozarow (2014) writes that "rather than simply protest against the failures of neoliberalism and representative democracy, citizens actively engaged in a variety of collective actions inspired by ideas of social transformation and autonomy, and which practically rehearsed different ways of organising society that moved beyond the existing paradigm" (p.994).

According to the myth, the most evident consequence of this process – at workplace level – are the Workers' Recuperated Companies. While the last days of 2001 undoubtedly unleashed an unprecedented energy for subversion and reconstruction inside and outside the companies, the above statement is not accurate for two reasons: there were WRCs before 2001, among which is the notorious IMPA factory, recuperated from 1998; and the scheme of rupture and reconstruction also touched many other citizens who had the double intention of surviving the crisis and preserving the autonomy they seemed to have created. La Cacerola is a product of the latter, and more specifically is the result of the organisational effort of *assambleas vecinales* (also *barriales* or *populares* – "neighbourhood assemblies").

[23] The formula 'conurbano bonaerense' (outskirts of Buenos Aires) does not simply indicate the peripheral areas of the Capital, but instead condenses a complexity of spatial, social and economic meanings that identify the thick layer of the city standing between the countryside and the centre. This conurbation, comprising 24 *partidos* (cities that have been agglomerated with Buenos Aires), makes the Greater Buenos Aires population reach 13 Million people – according to the INDEC 2010 Census – of which only 3 Million belong to the C.A.B.A., the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. The urban dynamics generated by the presence of such a massive conurbation are impossible to summarise here in a few words, yet it is at least important to remark how the physical and social magnitude of the *conurbano* – largely occupied by lower classes and migrants – can impact on the political dynamics of the Capital.

Sitrin (2012) describes these congregations as a de-classed group, comprising workers, unemployed, and middle-class citizens. Without any form of leadership and reinventing direct forms of democracy, these assemblies sprouted in each neighbourhood square or aggregation point. Rapidly, these became the spaces to practice *horizontalidad*, where people tried new ways to support each other, to meet their basic needs, but also to fundamentally rethink society.

Dinerstein (2015) calls this process "reinventing the agora" (p.115), arguing that the *asambleas vecinales* "shaped – temporarily and contingently – the collective dream of democratic praxis that self-interrogates and questions, as Castoriadis suggests, the laws that govern society" (*Ibid.*). These congregations rapidly and impressively bridged the gap between the theoretical and the practical: "the personal abilities and experience of the *vecinos* ("neighbours") were put at the service of the everyday life of the commons" (*Ibid.*, p.116) and became nodes of solidarity in action. "The *asamblea* is a body that thinks by doing" (Bielsa 2002, p.54).

> La Cacerola started from within a neighbourhood assembly. There was an assembly of about a hundred people in a square near here. That way there is Almagro, that other direction Villa Crespo [names of *comunas*, the municipality's subdivisions], we are in Caballito, but at the border. Villa Crespo was extremely mobilised, with high participation. But Almagro was impressive. At one point there were something like 7 or 8 assemblies, some of them with more than 500 people each (Silvia, La Cacerola, my translation).

From the impulse given by a small neighbourhood assembly, a group of committed citizens decided to start a venture. One of them had previously worked in a bakery and had the skills, while through common friends at the WRC IMPA they found a place. The goal was to open a culinary cooperative, with the social purpose to feed everyone in their reach, and eventually make a living out of it, amid one of the worst crises their country had every faced.

> There was a *compañero* ("comrade") who ran a bakery near here. The bakery had to shut down because the owners had not paid the rent for months, and they wanted to sell it. From the assembly we organised a movement to ask the lawyers to give him, at least, the machinery he had … which were all very old, had a small value, but at least it was something. He was a pastry chef and a baker. We thus decided to start working with gastronomy … and then see what we could include in our project. […] Here there was almost nothing, just remains of a construction and a lot of rubbish. Someone says this used to be a place where they fixed traffic lights. Then privatisation came, and they had to shut down. When we arrived, the bottom part had burned down, the roof was broken, there were just the walls […]. And the neighbours feared the place because they said there were homeless staying here. For this reason, the CGP [Centros de Gestión y Participación – decentralised bodies of the City Government of Buenos Aires] had given the place to IMPA

> to look after it. Then came Murua [Eduardo, worker of IMPA and member of the MNER] and said, "let's give the place to them, they need it more than we do", because IMPA was not using it. And I remember he told me "Please, tell me if you don't like it because the place it's a disaster!" [...] With the help of IMPA we managed to have the keys in September 2002, and in April we began rebuilding with the help of a bricklayer, we did this and that, got rid of the damp ...". (Silvia, La Cacerola, my translation).

La Cacerola is clearly not a WRC, having been formed from scratch. Yet, as it will be explained in greater detail during the analysis, it shares a large part of the prefiguration capacity, the organisational strategies and the political hope with the 'movement' of WRCs. The experience of La Cacerola was worth deepening for at least two reasons. Firstly, while not underestimating the prominent role of WRCs in the 'movement', La Cacerola provides a more direct possibility of parallel analysis with the many Greek workers' cooperatives spontaneously organised. Secondly, the focus on WRCs led to an underestimation of other Argentinian's experiences of self-organisation, with their side by side yet particular trajectories.

The story of La Cacerola from those days of 2002 to today has been a rollercoaster ride, fighting against bureaucracy, striving to survive financially, counting on the substantial help and solidarity of many, while actively supporting their peers in the self-managed movement, and remaining open to society from which they came. Today the place is a well-known, friendly and welcoming restaurant few blocks away from the central Parque Centenario, and at first glance its trajectory seems to have reached a happy end. This, however, does not consider the permanent state of precarity they live in. An article published on April 17, 2003, in the newspaper Pagina 12, recalls its first steps, when the line was already traced but countless battles lay ahead.

> Once it was a rat's nest. Today they produce bread for 24 schools. Once they were unemployed. Today they work and form a cooperative. They got together for the first time in those days of 19 and 20 December because "*they all must go"* [the slogan of those days]. Nobody left, and they stood together in the "country that forgets" and constructed. Today, the cooperative La Cacerola is a bakery that produces more than 1,000 sandwiches per day for the public schools of the city, sells its pastries to neighbours and students, and organises popular meals in Plaza Almagro. A former candidate to vice-presidency, a Uruguayan who lived in Sweden, a Psychology student and a baker who had to shut his business for the crisis are among the ten neighbours that, together with the movement of WRCs and the Ministry of Education's program *Unidades Productivas Solidarias*, weaved a solidarity

> project and managed to get, out of nothing, every day's bread. (Pagina 12, "Una panaderia armada en asamblea"[24], my translation).

Chilavert and Facultad Abierta

One of the prominent features of self-management that will be later analysed is the dichotomy workers-community, also interpretable as the quality of the commitment the workers' initiative has towards its neighbours, and vice versa, or how much the community can enter the spaces and processes of the workplace and become a living component of autogestión from within.

The Cooperativa Chilavert Artes Gráficas (abbreviated to 'Chilavert') is a palpable example of this phenomenon taking place. Marcelo Vieta (2014a), who spent part of his field research as an intern at the factory, describes the place as a "small and emblematic print shop in an economically challenged Buenos Aires neighbourhood" (p.195). Chilavert appears as among the direct creations of the 2001 crisis. Five months after the facts of December, a crowd of neighbours, activists, *asembleístas,* and workers of other WRCs were standing at the gates of the factory, defending eight workers inside the plant protecting their machinery.

> Taking over the business, the factory, was really powerful. It was a huge decision that included all the compañeros. At first we didn't know what to do, but when we realised that they were going to come and take the machines, well, then we had to make a decision. We took over the workplace. That step was reflexive, instinctive. (Worker from Chilavert, cited in Sitrin 2006, p.69)

What is today a printers' cooperative, in 1998 still had an owner and was precipitating into the crisis. The employer cut the wages, and the debt towards its workers began to accumulate. In 2002, the time was ripe to declare bankruptcy, close the factory, take the machinery and open a new business elsewhere. When recalling the story, the workers of Chilavert add that the they were unaware of the former owner having a warehouse ready to host the printing machines, and another business project to launch. These were the conditions upon which the occupation was decided.

> This was a very small workshop, and in fact the eight workers that eventually decided to occupy and recuperate the factory were almost the entirety of those in the production line. Some of them had spent more than 40 years of work in this place, therefore, until the very

[24] https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/sociedad/3-18936-2003-04-17.html

> last moment, they would have never thought the owner was about … to leave his words unfulfilled [betray them]. (worker or Chilavert, VI Encuentro, my translation)

If resisting the eviction was tough, achieving a legal recognition was an extensive and no easier process. Summarising, in April 2002 the workers occupied the establishment, in May the above described attempt to evict them took place. Already in October, with the fundamental support of the MNER and the help of IMPA among others, they managed to obtain the first *ley de expropriación* (expropriation law), granting a temporary right to occupy and utilise the structure.

Restarting the production and evolving into the small but solid company that today releases the books of Facultad Abierta, pamphlets, magazines and catalogues was another giant step. Some anecdotes of the initial turbulent times, including the intense support offered by neighbours and the first book release after passing the copies through a hole in a wall, will be reported in the analysis.

"The Programa Facultad Abierta (Open Faculty Program), a socially, politically committed and community-focused university extension program at the University of Buenos Aires's Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, was founded by activist faculty and graduate students in the thick of Argentina's years of deep socio-economic crisis in March 2002" (Ruggeri et. al. 2018, p. 195). Silvia of La Cacerola used an affectionate definition for Facultad Abierta, calling it "the university program which binds the faculty with the community" (my translation). The academic program is mentioned here because its central idea – to accompany and research the Argentinian's WRCs – was translated into practice deciding to open a 'WRCs Documentation Centre' within the spaces of Chilavert.

Over more than 15 year of history, the Programa strengthened its solidarity relationship with the WRCs, including Chilavert. Tens of books released by academics belonging to the program are in fact printed in this WRC, while public presentations for the release of national surveys often take place in the spaces of the factory.

The publication of surveys and reports, together with case-specific books, constitute a major scientific outcome of the Program. Perhaps even more effective are the efforts to create synergy and multiply the experiences of self-management. The tool used to obtain such goals were international and 'regional' meetings held in various parts of the world throughout the last decade.

> It was an initiative of the program of which I am the coordinator, that is the Programa Facultad Abierta. At first, the idea was to articulate or create a space of debate between different experiences of *autogestión* and work, including different forms of labour struggle, not only to recuperate factories or businesses, but also to fight for the economy, to fight for the workplace. That is the reason why the focus of the meetings was not just self-management, but also unionism, precarisation, informality, and exploitation [...]. With this idea, in 2007 we had the naivety to launch the first international Encuentro de la Economia de los Trabajadores. Now ten years are passed of this construction, that needed a lot of efforts, and that every time became more collective, more international. The first two meetings were held at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy at the UBA, [...] the third at the Universidad Metropolitana Xochimilco in Mexico, that helped to consolidate the international network. [...] In 2013 we had the Encuentro in João Pessoa, in the North-East of Brazil, ... (Ruggeri, VI Encuentro, my translation)

Another analytical element is the centrality of Argentina emerging from Faculdad Abierta and the meetings, affecting the whole 'movement'. The country is not just the place where Workers' Recuperated Companies formed in large numbers, but eventually where the concept of autogestión, as here intended, was progressively assembled. Nevertheless, sticking to their own theories and practices was seen, from the very beginning, as the worst-case scenario for the resistance of the very same local experiments. Motion was and is key, circulation is fundamental, and presence *within* the workplace vital. While the international Encuentro moved out of the University to enter the spaces of self-management, the expansion of the platform of discussion was reputed necessary.

> [We realised that] having a meeting every couple of years was good, but it was like starting from the beginning every time. A good idea to reinforce the network was to have 'regional' meetings in the years in between. I believe this was very important to have, today, here, a great diversity of countries and organisations, possibly including every continent. In 2014 we had the first round of 'regional' meetings [in South America, North America and Europe], [...] and I think the first Euromediterranean was essential to open the space of discussion in a European key. It was held in a WRC in France, FraLib, in the South near Marseille. [...] The second Euromediterranean meeting was organised with a very representative and interesting factory of Northern Greece: Vio Me. We have here their delegation. (Ruggeri, VI Encuentro, my translation).

The following global meetings – here branded 'Encuentros' or 'Workers' Economy meetings' for simplicity – took place in Venezuela in 2015 (the 5th) and in Argentina (the 6th) in 2017, which I attended. In addition, 'regional' South American and North American meetings were organised in the factory Textiles Pigüé and in the Universidad Obrera of Mexico (2014), then in Uruguay and again Mexico (2016), and more recently in Chile (2018). This repetitive, scattered and serious

organisational effort made Facultad Abierta central in every discussion around and within self-management.

Their Documentation Centre in Chilavert is open and freely accessible to the public, and "rather than have [it] cloistered within the academy, it has been imperative for us that it remain accessible to workers in particular" (Ruggeri et. al 2018, p.197). It is a co-created space with the workers in self-management, formally opening its doors on October 20, 2006. Beyond being the place where all the material of Facultad Abierta is kept and investigations conducted, it can be argued that the Documentation Centre is a political statement. "For us, [...] [it] manifests the clear reciprocal relationship and accessibility that we are convinced should explicitly exist between the publicly funded university and the communities that sustain it and that share common educational and developmental interests. [...] Etched into the Program Facultad Abierta's very name, we feel that articulating this open relationship is important both for mobilizing collaboratively created knowledge and for community-based training and capacity building" (*Ibid.,* p. 197).

Others Included

The experiences listed up to here are considered pivotal for the research, whether for their relevance in the international self-management environment, or for their characteristics of their organisational form, or even considering their capacity of networking. Throughout the field research there were however multiple interactions with a few actors that, eventually, are cited during the analysis.

Three prominent WRCs are mentioned several times throughout the research, and while a short description will not do any justice to them, it is at least necessary. The Industrias Metalúrgicas y Plásticas Argentina Cooperativa Ltda. (IMPA) has already been introduced as one of the first WRC to appear in the Argentina scenario, back in 1998. Founded in the 1930s, in its establishment was produced the first aeroplane of Argentinian aviation. The huge factory in the neighbourhood of Almagro, initially run by more than 500 people, had already transformed into a cooperative in 1961. On their website, retired workers recall the contradictions: "It was officially a cooperative by name, but not in fact. When somebody protested, he/she was left out. And when we wanted to do something, they kept an eye on us. There were assemblies, but they [the owners] told us what they

wanted, and when someone asked for a raise, they made a note and later fired him/her"[25]. In 1997, the finances of the cooperative spiralled downwards, and a year later the recuperation began. Today the factory is home to a renowned cultural centre and centre for activities, which I had the chance to attend regularly. More importantly, the rough but walkable path chosen by IMPA gave an impetus for the constitution of the MNER and directly impacted on the multiplication of recuperations all over Argentina.

Hotel BAUEN, "el Hotel del pueblo", is a self-managed business run in the spaces of a skyscraper between Callao and Corrientes, two main arterial roads of Buenos Aires. It has 20 floors and 220 rooms, and it was occupied by its former employees on the 21st of March 2003. The efforts to make the structure work autonomously was enormous, and the legal struggle is not yet over[26]. The Hotel, whose former name was Bauen (after the owner) while today's acronym B.A.U.E.N stands for (*Cooperativa de Trabajo) Buenos Aires una Empresa Nacional*, is a prominent symbol of recuperation. When entering the building that nowadays is a centre of an intense economic and social activity open to workers and activists alike, it is impossible not to notice the original austere interior. In the late 70s, when the military government was decimating the young 'antagonists', this was the place where the business and political powers would meet. In the auditorium, military and corporate entities would plan how to break the resistance of the Argentinian's working class. Ironically, the very same auditorium hosted the first plenary of the VI Encuentro of the Workers' Economy, in 2017.

The last of the 'big three' presented here is FaSinPat, also still known for its former name Cerámica Zanón. The factory opened its doors in the early 80s in the south-western city of Neuquén by the initiative of the businessman Luigi Zanón, when the military government was ruling upon Argentina. During the 90s production escalated, thanks to the good relationship between the owner and the national government of Carlos Menem, while from the year 2000 the employees began to fight to improve their working conditions and because wages were left unpaid. The conflict with the owner was harsh and many were fired, and eventually Zanón decided to close the

[25] http://www.recuperadasdoc.com.ar/descripciones/impa.htm (my translation)

[26] On the 26th of December 2016 the Argentinian president Mauricio Macri put his veto on the expropriation law that, after 14 years of struggles, the workers managed to pass at both houses of the Parliament (Ruggeri, BAUEN)

establishment, hoping to reopen the business somewhere else with a more docile labour force. Instead, history took another path when the workers occupied the buildings and protected machines amid fears and threatens of eviction. With the new autonomous and horizontal management, the factory has regained its economic viability and eventually hired new workers, while establishing solid relations with the community and building a public clinic in the region[27].

Back to Greece, Micropolis ("micro-city") is an inventive experience located in the city of Thessaloniki. Rather than a workplace, they are a social space that hosts different economic projects, which provide an income to some of the activists involved. It was formed in 2010 on the wave of the 2008 revolts following the killing of a young activist by the police in Exarcheia, Athens. As Merli (2017) recounts, Micropolis was the spatial product resulting from that struggle. It adopted the definition "social space for freedom" and aims at creating an autonomous community, structured around the general assembly and with some unique economic features. This experience will enter the discourse on self-management when reflecting specifically on the potentially Communalist outcome of the movement. While Micropolis cannot be considered a workplace in self-management per se, it carries a strong commitment to autonomously and jointly reprogramming society starting from work collectives.

Another experience worth mentioning is Perivolaki, a *kafeneion* in the neighbourhood of Petralona. Even if it does not appear among the subjects of the research as such, Perivolaki has been an interesting preliminary centre for observation of the Athenian neighbourhood life, of 'political cafeterias' dynamics, and the place of initial informal chats with locals during the Preliminary Field Research in 2016.

The last Cretan experience I met and included in these pages is Terra Verde. Based in Chania, the 2nd city of Crete for population and an important port, Terra Verde (Italian for "Green Earth") is both physically a shop for solidarity economy products and a space hosting events and many kinds of political meetings.

Terra Verde, as a business project, resembles a smaller version of the Athenian Syn Allois. The two are unsurprisingly in a strict relationship, and Syn Allois serves as a hub for the distribution of

[27] https://www.laizquierdadiario.com/Zanon-la-primera-fabrica-recuperada-en-la-crisis-del-2001

products such as Tatawelo Coffee for Terra Verde and other shops alike. The far more interesting part has to be found in their organisation and philosophy of action, rather than in what they appear to be – a 'regular' fair trade shop. Beyond this, Terra Verde is fascinating for their relationship with Rosa Nera. The latter is a well-known squat of Chania, in a building belonging to the Polytechnic School of the city occupied for the last 13 years. From the web of relationships of resistance woven underneath the city between Rosa Nera and Terra Verde we can have a glimpse of what is happening. The assumption is that the economic crisis unleashed a latent anarchist potential already flowing in the veins of Crete and let it emerge in surface with social strength. The question is whether activities of workers' self-management are merely an effect or perhaps rather a driver of this transforming social structure.

Their Common Nature

"Their epistemological practice is linked to a political practice which problematizes a politics led by vanguards or organized in a hierarchical manner in which individuals delegate their intellectual and political powers to a political leadership". This is Sara Motta (2011, p.179) describing the philosophy of action of the workers in the Urban Land Committees in Caracas, Venezuela. This quote on a distant and apparently unrelated experience of a Venezuelan organisational and political experience contains all the preliminary elements to begin with an analysis of self-management as their common element.

Sara Motta goes on to describe the Urban Land Committees (CTU – Comités de Tierra Urbana): "The CTU's project is relational and open, always moving, adapting and evolving. It is a prefigurative post-representational politics, a politics that is intellectual, affective, subjective and collective" (Motta 2011, p.179). 'Affective, subjective and collective', together with the overarching 'prefigurative' are complemented with a perception of a constant movement rather than a permanent achievement. These are the conceptual sails to embark on a journey in the agitated but exciting sea of workers' autonomous organisations operating in self-management.

The workers here are at the centre of the picture, yet even more pivotal is the *organisational* component of their stories. Organisation as in how workers arrange themselves, and how they

organise their politics with and within their community. The 'how' part is filled with praxis, from which political interpretations derive. These praxes and politics are 'affective, subjective and collective'. Likewise, the whole ensemble has an explicit tension towards prefiguration, which, according to Dinerstein (2015, p.2), is the "process of learning hope, [and] [a]utonomy is the organisational tool of this process". Holloway provides a brief description of what we mean here by autonomy, or better, autonomies:

> 'Autonomies' can be seen as self-sufficient units, spaces to which we have escaped, spaces in which we can construct or develop a distinct identity, a difference. In a world based on the negation of autonomy of self-determination, autonomy in a static sense is impossible. Self-determination does not exist: all that exists is the constant drive towards self-determination (Holloway 2010, p.910)

All the actors above share these fundamental characteristics, and the same spirit driving them towards self-determination. All of them are considered original examples of proactive reaction to what were and are financial, economic and, ultimately, social and intimate crises. The aim was not to explore each subject in depth, but rather to present them as possible examples of what can be done at workplace level during crises, in a constant tension where they construct possible trajectories of self-management, and to analyse these kinds of germs of self-organisation to wonder what form they can take, if translated in a different environment or if able to overcome their limitations.

From this they form a picture of what self-management could be and become, the challenges it must go through, the obstacles, the limitations, as much as the positive outcomes. Even if they are distant, different and peculiar, I am not presenting each of them as stories on their own, but instead as part of a painting. Their trajectories contain similar features: they are comparable actors, as in groups of people struggling to overcome similar crises. And they point towards similar, yet not identical, directions. Considering the picture, I reason about how each trajectory has influenced each other: I will call this magnetic effect 'reverberations', as in, for instance, the aggregating elements the Argentinians were capable of reverberating to their Greek counterparts that ultimately contribute to steering the Greek trajectories towards a 'common horizon'.

I am referring to a common horizon rather than a similar goal, because we have a horizon line these trajectories point to. What can be found after that line has yet to be seen and surely it would look different for each of them. Nevertheless, they all share the precise will to reach that common line

of horizon. The many dots on the line represent the multi-possibilities of self-organisation. Therefore, there is not a clear or unique answer from these experiences but rather a common tension. This horizon is not agreed in political terms, nor worded, but instead must be retraced among the praxes. There is, hence, a magnetic effect immanent in their practices, that through reverberations of their political will, contributes in steering trajectories toward a common perspective. These experiments exist within, against and beyond the capitalistic relations, for they "navigate the open veins of capital" (Dinerstein 2016) seeking for a way out, a crack to infiltrate, a side way in which to expand and replicate.

Before addressing the waves of reverberations they generate and the shape of their political desire, we need to focus on the core element that distinguishes them. Beyond respecting the exclusion criteria, their common feature here identified is a unique capacity of prefiguration in the form of self-management, or rather *autogestión.*

4. Autogestión as Prefiguration

In this chapter I will dissect what I identified as the common nature of these subjects, or *autogestión*. The latter will be analysed starting with a reflection on the etymology of the word and explaining the preference for the Spanish version over the English one. Then, I will consider when autogestión was a tangible presence in the last centuries all over the world. This historical exercise allows me to situate the current experiences of Argentina and Greece in a longer historical thread of counter-hegemonic practices. Furthermore, it illustrates how when autogestión surfaces it is often accompanied by societal antagonism and brings to questioning the borders between labour and life. The focus will invariably stay on autogestión as a practice through which political imaginaries are fashioned. As such, some of the praxes observed in the self-managed workplaces of Greece and Argentina will be put under the spotlight to grasp the essence of autogestión at economic and organisational level. The synthesis of this analysis will be the conceptualisation of autogestión as a form of praxes-driven prefiguration. The last section will revolve around the claim that these experiences, as much as their historical antecedents, are bringing about a substantial challenge to the present time. Their practices, I will argue, point towards a future where not just their workplaces are turned upside down, but also society is politically reimagined as a subject capable of self-managing itself.

Defining Autogestión

Trying to define autogestión means attempting to depict something in motion, or rather capturing its essence among its unparalleled manifold forms. Autogestión is its practices, yet its practices are countless and often unalike. Autogestión is movement, thus what must be kept relevant is its direction. Still, its directions are not converging lines, whereas parallel, cross-cutting and shifting trajectories. But they all point toward a common horizon, and that is perhaps the only static element in autogestión.

Before attempting a definition, it is necessary to remember that there is no set of predetermined rules, nor agreement of what praxes must be adopted, but rather constant experimentation in the key of self-organisation, critical thinking and horizontality.

> Autogestión is the possibility that we – all people – have to realize ourselves professionally, economically, and in our capacities to labour. It emerges from within us and together with the people with whom we want to share this realisation, but without sacrificing personal freedom, without sacrificing personal dignity, and from our own developmental potential. It is, in other words, about the possibility of the full development of the person (De Pascuale 2009).

> Therefore, autogestión is not only a substitute, but rather the proliferation of autogestión strengthens the workers under the condition of dependency, because an alternative to unemployment appears, something that can be done if the owners shut down our businesses. [Autogestión] appears as a more humane and supportive alternative. And it also strengthens those unemployed workers that can see experiences such as Vio Me, Campichuelo, BAUEN, FraLib … as a possible way out. (Ruggeri, Il Euromediterranean, my translation)

> Autogestión, in practice, [is a process] of learning and correcting, neither something finally obtained, nor a promised paradise, but rather the beginning of a process towards liberation (Guillen 1990).

Autogestión, as much as horizontalism, is the result of an immediacy, of the urgency to bring virtue out of necessity. Practically, it is the only choice left for many workers when it comes to survival. In the words of Argentinian self-managed workers, autogestión can be nothing more than the only practical way out from the absurd violence of austerity.

> In reality, it wasn't a factory occupation, for us. […] We stayed on December 18, 2001 because we didn't have enough money to get home. Where were we going to go with two pesos when the bus costs four? […] We waited for two months for the bosses to come back. We went to the unions, the Ministry of Work, all with the intention of getting the boss to come back and offer us a solution. He never came. So we decided to work. (Liliana, Brukman on Sitrin 2006, p.68)

Autogestión does not necessarily bring to factories occupation. Rather, it is here intended as a mean to reproduce collective and horizontal practices in any workplace run by its own workers, without bosses. Still, it is undeniable that the magnitude of the effect that Workers' Recuperated Companies in Argentina had on the concept of *autogestión*, almost monopolising it.

The component of solidarity, which might seem contextual, is rather the essence of *autogestión* in its constant motion from the workers to society and back. Running a workplace by themselves,

given the actual market conditions, the legal restriction, the violence of bureaucracy and power interferences, is already a huge challenge. It literally pushes workers to their limits, both physical (risk of not eating or sleeping enough, lack of salary to support families, etc.), as well as financial, organisational and relational.

Solidarity steps in here and is the one and only resource none of the corporations or 'regular' businesses can count on. "People you don't even know – who you've never seen before in your life – are fighting for you" (Candido, Chilavert on Sitrin 2006, p.69). "From the moment we occupied the clinic, people from the [social] movement started approaching us – that is to say, other recuperated workplaces and people from different organisations came to offer support. So we didn't feel alone" (Elvira, Fenix Salud on Sitrin 2006, p. 75).

Autogestión is the result of never-ending attempts to practice resistance, even without any theory behind it. "I haven't read much Trotsky or Marx, or anything about what socialism or capitalism is, but according to what people have come and told us, what we're doing here is the epitome of socialism" (Carlos, Zanón on Sitrin, p.87). To conclude, autogestión is a social, economic, political dynamic that needs to be sustained in practice every day. Ruggeri (2014a) defines the concept, for the context of workers recuperation, affirming that "autogestión means that the workers collectively impose the norms for the production, the organisation of labour processes, the purpose of profits, and their relationship with the [external] economy and society. Autogestión is a permanent dynamic of relation between the workers that star in it, and as such it cannot be reduced to a determined legal form of business" (p. 41, my translation).

Why 'Autogestión'?

Why use '*autogestión'* and not 'self-management'? Two are the reasons behind this linguistic choice[28]. The first is an attempt to overcome Eurocentric conceptualisations of non-European born phenomena (referring to the Argentinian autogestión) or taking place in non-English mother tongue countries (Greece). Moreover, 'autogestión', unlike 'self-management', is a Spanish term

[28] Yet, to preserve the fluency in the narration, the two terms 'autogestión' and 'self-management' are used interchangeably across the whole dissertation. Nevertheless, even when using 'self-management', the concept I refer to is invariably the one of autogestión as explained in this chapter.

with Greek origins, therefore comprehensible for modern Greek speakers. As such, it seemed much more apt for the context of this research.

Secondly, and more importantly, 'autogestión' and 'self-management' do not carry equivalent meanings and are rarely utilised to describe experiences of comparable nature. 'Self-management' finds its ideal environment in Business Studies, while 'autogestión' in the working-class resistance. Vieta (2014b) structures his defence of 'autogestión' in place of 'self-management' by reflecting on the philological origin of the term, composed of the Greek word αυτός (self, same) and the Latin *gestio*, deriving from *gerere* (to bear, carry, manage) (Farmer 1979, p.59).

The Latin component *gerere* expands the meaning of autogestión beyond the rigidity of 'self-management', to include processes of self-creation, self-conception and self-definition. The Spanish word is "pregnant with ethico-political relevance for the struggle for freedom from hierarchical and autocratic systems of control and exploitation, drawing on the ancient philosophical notion of potentiality" (Vieta 2014, p. 783).

And why utilise 'autogestión' instead of the more encompassing and diffusely recognised terminology of the so-called 'Social and solidarity economy' (SSE)? The concept of SSE tends to fly over self-managed companies, and sometimes it melts with autogestión itself. In truth, no one can affirm in certainty what SSE means (Ruggeri and others 2012), but it appears to include a range of actors among which only few practice autogestión, such as: NGOs, SMEs, cultural associations, barter clubs, traditional and new co-ops. The common element seems to be derived for subtraction: all these heterogeneous actors are neither public nor private, but belong to the so-called 'third sector'. Only a few among these openly move against capitalism, whereas others prefer to follow the principles of a capitalist economy with 'ethical characteristics'. Among the latter we find actors like the social enterprises, which certainly refuse some of the neoliberal principles, but at the same time do not seem capable of bringing about any substantial challenge to the nature of capitalism (Shaw and de Bruin 2013). As such, they cannot be examples of autogestión.

Autogestión is not confinable to a social economy, nor describable only in terms of 'solidarity'. It is less encompassing than SSE although nothing close to a philosophical orthodoxy. Its main difference from SSE has probably to be found in its depth, commitment and engagement in trying to negate and overcome the violence of capitalism. The outcomes of self-managed businesses

might even resemble to the ones of social and solidarity economy enterprises, given the constraints these workers must deal with. But when faced with the questions "can a social economy be also neoliberal?" workers performing autogestión invariably respond "no".

Contextualising Autogestión

The need to contextualise this concept stems from its distinctiveness in terms of history and theory. Autogestión is practiced today but deeply rooted in the history of labour struggles, with temporally and geographically situated examples of application. Autogestión is relatively liquid from a theoretical point of view, but can be seated among libertarian socialist theories, also containing prominent elements of Marxism and even influenced by the cooperativist tradition. Digging into its past provides the bases to appreciate what autogestión can prefigure for the future.

Situating Autogestión amid Political Theories

When trying to map the theoretical origins of autogestión, we find its roots in different 19th and 20th century schools of thought, and at the same time there is a profoundly modern reinterpretation of consolidated approaches. Autogestión seems to reach its modern conceptualisation after decades during which other political proposals were more predominant in both labour and organisational paradigms. In this sense, autogestión today is a creatively reinterpreted thought. It is probably resurfacing after drowsy decades by finding its ideal microclimate of reproduction in these recent neoliberal socioeconomic crises.

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, among the firsts to consider self-determination as a form of liberation, insisted on the collective property of worker's associations, such as workers and producers' cooperatives, as functional to his model of *mutuellisme*, or mutualism (1876). He also favoured grassroots-based associations and communes (Marshall 2009). For Michail Bakunin the capacity of human beings to self-organise and act cooperatively was crucial. Every person, starting from the many oppressed among us, should develop their full potential to reach such state of freedom (*Ibid.*). On this Bakunin aligned with the earlier mentioned philosophical standpoints of Peter Kropotkin (2012).

Another recurring element of modern autogestión inspired by Bakunin and Proudhon is the cooperative as a site of learning, where workers practice and organise the liberated society to come (Vieta 2014, p. 788). Cooperatives as "open school[s], both theoretical and practical, where the workman (*sic*) learns the science of the production and distribution of wealth, where he studies [...] by his own experience solely, the laws of [...] industrial organisation" (Proudhon 1876, p.78).

Workers' control, an essential element of autogestión, was discussed by several communist theorists, and even welcomed by communist parties, as an initial stage anticipating the following revolution. Lenin called this 'dual power', the situation in which revolutionary structures are already present and function in parallel with official institutions and powers (Azzellini 2015). These autonomous experiences are not welcome anymore – according to this narrative – once the revolution has reached its destination, and the control is once and for all in the hands of the communist government. In the latter scenario, self-management goes beyond the pale, and is seen as counter-revolutionary since it defends only individuals or groups interests. The interpretative key cross cutting this manuscript that sees these workers as 'out of control' is precisely arguing against the latter communist interpretation of self-management as detrimental to the revolution. By controlling their production and workplace, and by reconceptualising the meaning of work and labour, these workers ideally dodge the control of parties, governments and institutions, and their revolution in inherent in their practices.

Anticipating yet another theme, the meaning of cooperativism in early liberal or anarchist writings must be kept relevant throughout this analysis. During the last two centuries the cooperative form has evolved in unpredictable ways – to become more predictable for markets and capitalism, it could be argued – but for Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin it still represented the 'pure' projects of freedom from hierarchy. "For them cooperative societies were to be the bulwark from which a greater federation of producers' cooperatives and communes would replace the capitalist nation-state" (Woodcock 2018, p.110) Thus, when considering the cooperative for early anarchists, with its innovative organisational potential and its capacity to self-organise in federations of productive entities – vis-à-vis central authorities – we fall closer to today's workers' self-management than to contemporary 'traditional' cooperativism at large. The cooperativist argument will be deepened further on, still it is worth noting how this dated interpretation of cooperativism is closer to both

the theory of autogestión and to the practices implemented today by the self-managed collectives of Greece and Argentina – regardless of them being legally registered as 'cooperative' or else.

This interesting combination of autogestión and early cooperativism is historically significant having accompanied the workers since the beginning of industrialisation. "We can affirm that autogestión as form to organise the economy is a practice of workers since the beginning of the current social and economic regimen, at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Here we find the origin of the first cooperatives, that were associations of workers trying to flee the difficult conditions of life and work by producing without a boss" (Ruggeri and others 2012, p.15, my translation).

Throughout the early 20th century we can trace the influence of growing anarcho-syndicalism (especially in France, Spain and Argentina) and worker's councils (in Italy, Russia and Germany among others) prefiguring modern autogestión. Antonio Gramsci analysed the Italian workers' control experiences in the newspaper *L'Ordine Nuovo* (The New Order), with compelling inquiries among the *Biennio Rosso* (1919-20) experiences (Gramsci 1972).

Vieta (2014) sums up the history of how the term autogestión began to be used – even if "practices of autogestión long predate its conceptualization" (p. 792) – and to what it was associated:

1) First, it appeared in the 1950s among French marxists and anarchists to identify the potential of the Yugoslav model as an alternative to the both capitalism and state-socialism;
2) To describe past and notorious events where workers gained control the co-ownership of their economic and political life such as – the Paris Commune, the anarchist experiences in Catalonia during the civil war.
3) Significantly, it also appears then as connected to the post-colonial scenario in Algeria, during the reorganisation of 1962;
4) Lastly, the term accompanied some among the many 1968 social movements, specifically those aiming at a post-capitalist society (Balestrini and Moroni 1997).

Autogestión took a step back after the defeat of the revolutionary forces during the civil war in Spain (Dolgoff 1974) and as a result of repression under Stalinism in the USSR. The current attempt to recuperate the notion of autogestión and place it back at the centre of counter-hegemonic history can be seen, according to Ozarow and Croucher (2014), as a "viable channel for reinvigorating the sociology of work" (p.990).

In fact, "many workers and minority currents on the left, ranging from council communism, Trotskyism and Italian *operaismo* to socialists influenced by early Marx and the writings of Antonio Gramsci and Rosa Luxemburg, autonomist movements, social revolutionary currents (including several Latin American Marxists and revolutionaries), anarcho-syndicalism and other "heretical" left currents – have always viewed workers' control and councils as the base of a self-determined socialist society" (Azzellini 2015, p.16).

With this in mind, we can venture into a reconstruction of moments and circumstances under which autogestión – whether with its or other names – was evidently practiced and became a banner for societal transformation.

The Place of Autogestión in Revolutionary History

The following historical reconstruction anticipates the analysis of the current embodiments of autogestión in Greece and Argentina. This section stems from the need to frame the scattered and apparently disunited experiences encountered on the field into a rich painting of anti-hegemonic history that they acknowledge and that, eventually, belongs to them. Once understood as fragments of this coherent, long-lasting, and geographically significant mosaic, these experiences will appear much less isolated and politically fragile than they might appear at first glance.

The concept of autogestión, or workers self-management, as here intended is quite recent, nonetheless the ideological foundations of this anti-systemic approach are "almost as old as the history of the labour movement" (Ruggeri 2014a, p.49). Even if rarely named autogestión, this phenomenon appeared in several forms and mutations throughout recent history, before incarnating its contemporary figure. From ground-breaking experiences such as the first cooperatives or workers' collective to the 21st century occupied factories, the common element is always an organisational form decided, recurrently discussed and collectively managed by and for the workers.

One of the first moments of anti-systemic and self-organised rupture with the capitalist tradition where we can find evident traces of autogestión is probably the Commune of Paris in 1871. 'Council communism', a political thought aiming towards the formation of workers councils as basic structures towards the proletarian revolution, inspired both the Parisians and the Russians Soviets

experiences of 1905 and 1917 (Gluckstein 2011). Vieta (2014) explains that 19th century socialist thinkers were deeply influenced "by the myriad forms of workers' combinations and self-managed organisations that were emerging throughout Europe and its colonies during this period, including friendly societies, mutual associations, cooperatives and trade unions (MacPherson 2007; McNally 1993)" (p. 785)

Occupations of factories in Europe can be dated also in the early 20th century, for instance during the *biennio rosso* in Italy (1919-1920), when more than 200,000 workers participated in a general strike prior to occupying and collectively running their factories (Gramsci 1972). Not until the Spanish Civil War, however, we have actual experiences of power de-structuring and economic self-organisation that significantly differ from the socialist model. Under the influence of communitarian ideas, the Spanish anarchists organised a communalist government interacting with the Catalan industries. The CNT (National Confederation of Labour) made it possible to organise workers self-management in both local factories and small countryside businesses even in extremely harsh condition due to the war against Franco and the fascist regime. Here autogestión appears, however briefly, as an effective and efficient system alternative to both capitalism and state-centralised planned economy (Dolgoff 1974).

The defeat of Spanish Anarchism, together with the huge influence Communist parties had after this across Europe, relegated this notable example of a functioning self-organised system to the margins of 20th century history for a significant period. With the exception of the Catalan experience, few were 'successful' experiences, and labour movements became occupied with debates on unionism, party mobilisations and salaries. The stiffening of the Russian Revolution into a centralised State-controlled economy wiped out any positive reference to factory councils and workers control (*Ibid.*).

The aftermath of the Second World War saw the anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist movement become nearly extinct, and together with the new binomial alternative between nationalised or capitalism subdued factory, many among workers and theorists abandoned anti-statist or autonomists practices and conceptualisations. Still today, among WRCs with a widespread presence of Trotskyist workers, the aim is not autogestión but "nationalisation under workers control" (Ruggeri 2014a, p.53).

A peculiar mixed model was present in Tito's Yugoslavia, where a kind of institutionally-driven self-management was implemented. After the rupture with the Stalinist USSR, Yugoslavia seemed to recognise the limits of centralised economies and began a process of diversification (*Ibid.*). Workers' councils in Yugoslavia still represent a fascinating and 'viable' option for many Marxist scholars who support self-management but do not believe the proletarian revolution is achievable without a vanguard central authority. However, Dolgoff (1974) argues that the Yugoslavian experience, as well as the Cuban one, cannot be considered among the examples of workers' collectivisation and redistribution of power, being vertically controlled by hegemonic and repressive party structures.

One of the most common critiques of workers' control is that such experiences have a short life, thus implying that workers without a proper hierarchical structure and fluctuating in an autonomous political environment are, ultimately, a self-destructive force. Notably, this critique refers to a few workers occupations that did not last long due to harsh military repressions. Such is the case of many workers self-initiatives in Soviet republics during the Cold War. "Attempts by workers to install workers' control under "state socialism" [...] were repressed either by the ruling party or, if the ruling party gave in to the workers' demand, the *Union of Soviet Socialist Republics* (USSR) imposed the suppression of workers' control either politically or even militarily" (Azzellini 2015, p.14).

For instance, this was the case in Hungary in 1956, when workers' councils were established following the vision of 'communalising' state socialism, or during the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia in 1986, where workers of the Action Program took control of the factories. Poland is an even more interesting case, having been on the brink of widespread workers' control at least three times, in 1956 when workers' uprisings obtained a law on workers' councils (until abolished in 1958), then again during the mass protests in 1970; and, finally, when the anti-bureaucratic Solidarność movement peaked in 1980-81 aggregating workers in what was the first trade union among the Warsaw Pact countries not controlled by the communist party.

All the above-mentioned abrupt moments of workers' autonomy, solidarity and aggregation were brutally repressed, with an army invasion, as in the case of the Prague Spring, by military coups of the ruling party, kneecapping Solidarność on December 13, 1981, or regaining institutional control by any means necessary.

The word autogestión returns prominently among those one could hear in the streets of Paris in May 1968[29]. There, however, the meaning had already changed to become includable in a wider spectrum of political experiences. At a more tangible level the huge mobilisation of young people across France, first, and then Europe, was accompanied by a new wave of factory occupations and attempts to produce under workers control, even though party structures tried to subdue many workers to more institutional forms of political struggle (Balestrini and Moroni 1997). Ness and Azzellini (2011) recall that the 1970s wave of occupation in Italy, France and Portugal was the most recent before the contemporary one.

Communist Cuba represents a case study for state socialism, generally presented as 'the successful experience'. Nonetheless, during the initial stages of the Cuban revolution it is worth remembering the debates on the participation of Cuban workers in the economy, starring Ernesto 'Che' Guevara as Minister of Industry. Guevara lacked the respect towards orthodoxies needed to replicate the socio-economic model in Cuba as he was asked to do, rather insisting on 'abstract' elements such as the "human contribution" of the workers (Ruggeri 2014a), perilously closer to the social dimension of modern autogestión than to the revolutionary agenda of Castro. Notably, hundreds of thousands of Cuban workers had occupied their factories and kept them functioning in the early days after the fall of Batista's tyranny. This enthusiastic and creative moment inspired Guevara but vanished shortly after, as central economic planning took over (*Ibid.*)

Another moment with traces of workers control and partial autogestión - although brief and cruelly ended - was Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government in Chile, between 1970 and 1973. The *cordones industriales* ("industrial belts"), organs of bottom-up workers' power, were formed as a result of the progressive radicalisation of the popular and workers' organisations. Initially intended

[29] That Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein call "The great rehearsal". "We therefore project probable realignments in the alliance systems of the interstate system along with increase sharp economic fluctuations, a sharpened (and in particular a geographically widened) class struggle, an increasing inability of states to control their civil societies, and a persistent reinforcement of the claims to equality by all the disadvantaged status-groups (p. 114)". "After 1848, the world's old left were sure that 1917 would occur. They argued about how and where and when. But the middle-range objective of popular sovereignty was clear. After 1968, the world's antisystemic movements [...] showed rather less clarity about the middle-range objective" (p.115). One of my main claims is that these workers, have, in fact, a middle-range objective, and they are actively and pragmatically prefiguring towards it. The key element to understand it is to think beyond the goal of sovereignty.

to pressurise Allende's government to socialise companies that refused to accept workers' rights, the *cordones* ended up aligning with the Popular Unity party in defending the country under the attack of both internal and external forces. Significantly, in response to factory closures – mainly due to the owners' political strategy to destabilise Allende's government – the workers of the industrial belts occupied the establishments and kept them alive. This convergence between a self-organised workers movement and a political party was circumstantial, as was the ability of the movement to preserve its independence and radicality even when doing so (Fishwick 2019).

Short lived occupation of factories and attempts to realise forms of self-management emerged in the first months of the 1949-50 Chinese Revolution, or during the Revolução dos Cravos (The Carnation Revolution) in Portugal, 1974 (Varela, do Paço, and Alcântara 2014). Remarkably, most of these attempts come into view in distant places and times as results of decolonisation processes, or in any occasion of political crisis in which "the capitalist grip over the production and the state is weakened or loosens up" (Ruggeri 2014a, p.55). The latter was also the case of Algeria after the liberation (Fanon 2004), or in the African Socialism of Julius Nyerere in Tanzania. Nyerere actuated a form of vertical socialism yet factually promoted the multiplication of grassroots experiences of collectivisation and community-based production, some of which still resonate into the current societal organisation in different regions of Tanzania (Kapuscinski 2002).

Workers' cooperatives of Rojava, Kurdistan, must necessarily be mentioned as the closest to us in time. These organisational structures serve the economic purpose of the co-federalist revolution taking place in the Syrian Kurdistan (Aslan 2016), and allowed for wider inclusion of women in the economy, as well as for a deep reconsideration of ecological impact (Knapp and others 2016). Their almost contemporary predecessors are the self-organised economies of the Zapatista movement in the Mexican region of Chiapas (Anguiano 2005) and the Movimiento Sem Terra (MSF) of the landless peasants in Brazil. The three altogether had a profound influence in both practical and theoretical education for self-managed workers of Greece and Argentina.

Practicing Autogestión

Autogestión is praxes-driven in the sense that, despite the multiplicity of theoretical influences, the tangible form constantly rewrites its essence and proves its feasibility. The journey among workers

in self-management across Greece and Argentina allowed a first-hand appreciation of these practices in action. In the following section, I will expand from elements gathered during the field research in the workplaces to reflect upon the workers' reinterpretation of conventional economic and organisational features. The aim is to shed light on how autogestión represents a form of substantial alterity to the globalised work-life system, and it does so even when external power forces are burdening the workers. Notably, the practices of autogestión are visible in parallel – on the self, on the working group, and onto the community simultaneously – but also behave like sound waves, sending perceptible signals to distant worlds, always hoping for an answer. Throughout the next section I will tackle: substituting capital with solidarity and labour; ethical productions and products; economy of needs; financial independence; cutting extra-profits; de-alienation; and the dark side of the economy of autogestión.

The Economics of Autogestión

In the contemporary turbo-capitalist environment, a widespread critique of small scale self-managed ventures addresses their supposedly lightweight economic power. For instance, how can a small cafeteria compete with the gigantic economies of scale of Starbucks? And, perhaps even more challenging in a situation of economic crisis, why would clients prefer the small business – theoretically able to sell only higher priced products – when they can only afford the cheapest goods available?

Even beyond this, their economic capacity is allegedly limited by the fact that not only these are micro ventures, but that they are even pursuing 'ethical' goals, such as discarding products that do not comply with certain labour or environmental standards. When the picture is complete including their *political* dimension, their economic viability seems to reach levels of skyrocketing complexity.

This, however, can be proven to be quite inaccurate. As anticipated, autogestión is articulated in practices that point towards a philosophy of action. As such, it must cover not just the tools to dismember capitalist relations, but also the economic skills to survive on the brink between a half-capitalist and a half-not environment. Compromise is necessarily a keyword, given the limited space of operation of these ventures. On the other hand, solidarity and sharing (*compartir*) do not just provide philosophical comfort, but rather grant powerful economic tools to rely on.

Capital – the lack of – is regularly considered among the major issues to face almost daily for any workers' self-managed co-ops. For WRCs the problem is slightly different, since former employees decided to occupy and utilise the already existing capital. Nevertheless, they must often face its deterioration and amortisation costs, while being unable to invest to keep it functioning for adequate levels of production. For self-managed ventures organised from scratch the first massive problem is clearly where to find the initial capital. And even once solved, the necessity to invest is a recurrent challenge, and becomes almost unsurmountable when considering those subjects that willingly exclude the possibility of asking for financial loans and refuse institutional support (in forms of subsidies, European projects, etc.).

> But you have to think that when a worker does not have capital to invest, what he has is in fact his working time. And when we know that capital is nothing else but accumulated work, we have a new tool to begin with. (Worker of Chilavert, my translation)

Having an edifice from where to operate was the preliminary condition for all these businesses. No single path was preferred, and while some found their spot at a rentable price, others had to rely on their acquaintances among the community in struggle. Those who had to rent, such as Halikouti, saw the advantage of jointly committing to paying a price that seemed affordable only if shared.

> [talking about the place that was given them through IMPA and MNER] [it was] terrible! But for us it was heaven sent, because we would not have been able to rent any other place. We signed a deal that was a 'temporary ownership' that is renewed every year. (Silvia, La Cacerola, my translation)

Another possible path is addressing economic issues by separating them from the legal ones, given the heavy weight of both. Apo Kinou began its activities as an informal business, then evolved into a legally recognised one once the capital sufficed. A similar example can be found in the Italian WRC RiMaflow, which despite being a recuperated company had to go through an informal stage, then to obtain partial legal recognition.

> We started without any capital, so it was very hard to invest in anything. So, after the third year, that we had created a small capital, we were ready to make our first 'project', let's say. To have a place in Heraklion where we could meet people, talk with people, be in the community. (Worker of Apo Kinou)

Consciousness about one's own labour power is not enough when not even initial capital is available, as in the case of workers' self-managed cooperatives. Silva from la Cacerola described in

detail how their experience of cooperativism was in fact more complex than the ones of recuperation precisely for the lack of initial capital and the low level of workers' skills.

On the other hand, she added, they never had to face evictions or struggle to obtain legal recognitions. Still, La Cacerola, similarly to many among its peers, found a small initial capital within themselves, their friends and families. The remaining part, necessary to open a proper business, was obtained through what I here define as substituting capital with solidarity and labour: where practical solidarity takes the place of financial resources. This form of socio-economical realignment constitutes a tangible example of neoliberalism deconstructed and human economies raised. It can be argued that these workers are reconstructing a 'real' (human) economy vis à vis the 'science-fiction' of capitalism (Davies 2018). No business manual would ever advise a manager to rely upon the help of acquaintances, on the presumption that they would ask for nothing in return. And this can happen here only because they have substituted 'manager' with 'assembly of workers', 'acquaintances' with 'community', 'assets' with acts of mutualism and solidarity. In two words, they imposed horizontalism over hierarchies, and began to walk on a path towards affective economies.

> The initial money was put by some among our families. My family, my mom, she helped. But, again, I'm not talking about a lot of money because back then everything was … well, no one had it. Then, along all our history, we had a great deal of solidarity. For instance, there was a comrade whose dad worked as electrician. He decided not only to install the electrical components without asking for anything in return, but eventually he gave us some pieces he had. We got the machineries from the baker, our comrade, and even if these were old … we had them for free! (Silvia, La Cacerola, my translation)

> [We found] this place out of luck, and it was the cheapest we could find, with a very good owner … but then it took us a lot of time to prepare it, because it needed a lot of work, and we did much of it with the help of friends. Of course, we had to pay some people, but we also did a lot of work ourselves, and we finally managed to open the shop at the end of August 2011 […]. (Niovi, Lacandona)

> […] Furthermore, the comrade who supervised all the architectural plans was a friend, he did not ask for anything. Not just that, he managed to collect remnants from another building site where he had worked, and donated them to us. […] I could tell you many more examples of how we got much of this, throughout the years, with the help of our people. An impressive solidarity. (Silvia, La Cacerola, my translation).

Once found the initial capital and the place, workers must reason about business choices. In this regard, the approach of self-managed enterprises varies significantly. For WRCs the option is either continuing with the previous production or utilizing the available machineries to develop a new kind

of product. Self-managed cooNviperatives constituted from scratch can instead decide what they want to sell, in doing so they tend to follow a list of criteria where survival needs merge with political intentions. The first non-traditional economic feature is an analysis of the context, not merely in terms of market possibilities but rather superimposing the logic of an 'economy of needs'. Meanings are reassigned when 'clients' become 'community', implying that beyond their purchasing power, what is considered vital for the self-managed collective is reciprocal knowledge and mutual agreement of what their common needs are.

> So, we asked ourselves: what are the needs of our community? We started from the needs. And we said: the basis of all needs is food. Hence agricultural products. Because if you are self-sufficient from that point, then you have a big relief … I can eat, I can survive, and from that we start seeing more clearly what we have in front of us, what we deal with. (Worker of Apo Kinou)

A 'political choice' towards the product or the production does not necessarily represent a precondition for the creative change proposed by autogestión, since the main alterations take place at the level of organisational and social dynamics. This is the reason why, for an analysis of the phenomenon, it was not deemed necessary to select businesses upon their production, but rather considering their organisational principles. Nevertheless, I argue that autogestión is an integrated approach, encompassing all the potential aspects of the socio-economic human experience. The productive preferences are often among the ones succumbing to compromise due to the pressure of the neoliberal market, but rarely do workers in self-management decide to exclude them from their re-conceptualisation. While constraints to substantial changes are more evident here, attempts to reconfigure production itself are not absent at all. These include aiming to reduce the environmental impact and food miles, rediscovering or re-inventing traditional products, supporting like-minded producers (as in the case of Zapatista coffee), and creating a network for internal distribution among them. Creativity is vital here to exist and resist in the capitalist market.

> We have the fortune, of all us Mediterranean, to be in a place that can produce super quality products without any chemicals. We started by producing oil, we exported it, we set a rule to have a good quality product, because one of our values is ecology and respect for the nature, for the soil, for the plant, for the people who grow it and the people who consume it. […] Another product we make is mustard, from wild mustard seeds. That was an accident! We had a field, seeded with barley, but it was invaded by a very common wild plant, you could see all the field was yellow for the flowers … so we lost our production. What could we do with that? We studied and found out that this wild plant is a 'cousin' of

> mustard, we did a lot of research, experimenting, asking around, until we finally started producing and selling it. (Worker of Apo Kinou).

In Greece, self-managed co-ops habitually sell traditional, locally produced and highly consumed goods such as coffee, oil, bread, by and large Mediterranean foods. Likewise, in Argentina many among them offer pizzas, steaks (*milanesas*), and pastries (*medialunas*, *empanadas*). WRCs who have reconverted their production, such as Vio Me, similarly decided to pursue environmental goals, hence trading in biological soaps and cleaning products. The saleability of their productive outcomes would be however incomplete without a breakdown of the clientele. All of them seem to compensate the probably insufficient sales to ordinary people with another slice of profits made from 'educated' clients.

> In general, we are forced to 'separate' the seasons for working reasons. In the winter, we have a group of clients who are here the whole year. Most of them are guys with whom we share the same ideas. For sure, in the summer season Rethymno becomes a touristic spot, so we have much more variety. (Worker of Halikouti)

> There are people that come here on purpose. That is the nice thing, that gives us more strength. Maybe you have the teenager who can say "it's a bit expensive for a *gyros*[30]" and we don't judge … but these people are not really not so … able to understand exactly what's going on here. But there are also others who come and say "we read about you, we are so happy that people in this generation are still *alive*" and this gives us energy, more passion … we all share with these people a different ways of doing things. (Worker of Apo Kinou)

Cretan experiences can rely on a relatively small community where interconnections are frequent and socio-economic awareness quite high, whereas in Athens the 'conscious clientele' must be slowly built inside and outside the neighbourhood, while benefitting from the broader politicised basin that the city provides. In Buenos Aires, the experience of La Cacerola exemplifies once again how solidarity can produce economic outcomes and eventually raise the level of financial stability. Silvia recalls that Andrés Ruggeri from the University of Buenos Aires had found an agreement to let them sell breakfast before lesson hours, and it was a matter of time before the tables of La Cacerola became invaded by the students.

The chain of production is re-evaluated entirely when deciding to embark on a project of autogestión, hence the supplier side is questioned as much as any other. Except when agricultural

[30] Common Greek street-food dish similar to kebab or shawarma.

products are made by themselves – as in the case of Apo Kinou – suppliers must be ethically reliable. Their consistency is judged based on categories such as: dimension (the smaller and more self-managed form of production, the better), environmental sustainability (no use of pesticides, etc.), ethical standards of production, and respect for just labour conditions. Above all, the preference is always given to politically supported projects – goods sold by MST, Zapatistas, Kurdish groups, etc. – or to utilise and exchange products from other experiences of workers' self-management. Along these lines, Syn Allois sells the soaps and the merchandising of Vio Me; Terra Verde buys Zapatista coffee through Syn Allois, Apo Kinou utilises the cryptocurrencies of the ICH; and as seen above Facultad Abierta endorsed the products of La Cacerola within the University of Buenos Aires. As a rule, any kind of middleman between the producer and the workers is constantly perceived as a major disruption to the just commerce they intend to do.

> Initially, we chose to prioritise products that cover the basic needs of a household. The producers we collaborate with produce their goods with respect for the environment and the nature, focusing on high quality at the same time. In terms of economics and their relations with their employees, as well as their general stance in society, these producers prioritise their workers' rights and work together with honesty, justice and solidarity. We could say that we personally know 80% of the producers that supply Beyiri[15].

During the interview, the workers of Halikouti also stated that they hoped more young workers might decide to collectivise land and start cultivating in Crete. They argued that while long-established farmers "they're just waiting for money, or support, from the European Union programmes", the younger, like-minded people they know personally might well attempt to organise the first sector in a collective way, granting workers'-controlled products from producer to consumer.

Revenues are essential to any business initiative, and workers in self-management claim that their horizontal organisation cuts extra profits for anyone above them, allowing for a fair redistribution and higher sustainability. Another battleground for these experiments is high quality: the other side of cutting hierarchical costs is trying to invest in unique products almost impossible to find elsewhere. 'Ethical products' are commonly sold to an aware clientele who buy them for their *political* quality above any other feature. However, the products of these workers, they argue, need to have a high quality to compete in the non-political market and to validate their idea for the rationale behind it. In short, they do not seek philanthropic support, but instead recognition as valid, independent, radical socio-economic actors.

> All this is a very big thing in our philosophy. Since the price of the oil is set by the global market, in Greece every year we wait … what price will have olive oil this year? If Spain and Italy have produced a lot, then Greece goes down. The price was raised last year because we didn't have any oil, the year that will come the price will fall because we expect more production. We said: we don't want to be involved in this thing. We decided instead to put a price we believe is fair for the product, is fair for the producer, is fair for the consumer. We put around 4 Euros per litre of oil. We could make super profits out of this product, but we don't want to do that. We want to be clear, to be happy as sellers and keep producers happy. Also, the organic oil is sold at twice the price of normal oil. We have super quality oil for a lower price [than the organic], but not certified. The certification is something we don't seek. (Worker of Apo Kinou).

Workers in self-management pursue a high degree of independence in their business choices, aiming to keep them as political as possible. Avoiding certifications by preferring to rely on a known clientele who recognise the validity of the products is a statement of political intentions. On the financial side, when addressing the possibility of accessing external funds, these workers do not share identical positions, but agree on boycotting financial institutions considered among those responsible for the crisis. On the other hand, initial capital and investments are seldom accessible without bank loans or institutional support. The position of Vio Me could be described as deep-seated if compared to other among their peers, given that they openly reject any kind of external support unless it is coming from actions of bottom-up solidarity. Also, they hope to create an independent fund and logistical support among the self-managed co-ops worldwide. Not all the self-managed co-ops can afford and support such a radical position, but while compromises are present the common aim is in line with the tactics of Vio Me.

> As for state funding, I think it is important that we answer we do not need it anymore. No state and no banking system. (Worker of Vio Me, UniverSSE panel "Financing the solidarity revolution", translated)

Beyond external financing, the internal redistribution of revenues is the most exceptional peculiarity of these self-managed experiences. Once again, there is no static rule and every organisation is considered to have the right to choose its path. For instance, cooperatives such as La Cacerola opted for different payrolls based on seniority and duties, whereas Vio Me and Syn Allois maintain systems closer to equal pay for everyone. All of them agree that their wage system might undergo changes as the experiences moves on, and none of them sees it as a problem per se. In fact, to prefigure is not only to conceive what could be done beyond our schemes, but to be able to adapt it as reality moves forward (Maeckelbergh 2011).

> We believe in equal relations, everybody in the collective must have equal relations. [So] equal pay, equal privileges, equal obligations (Worker of Halikouti)

> We spent around two years working for 200 pesos each. So, [we worked] many hours for free. Then we started gaining a bit more and maybe we could share 100 pesos more among everyone. Everything perfectly shared, because it was a totally egalitarian system. (Silvia, La Cacerola).

> Through the assembly we had … because the assembly was the place of the decision-making since the beginning … we decide for everything, it is not something difficult … we raised the question: how do we pay ourselves? We started having results, and with a completely different system than before, because that system could not continue, so the assembly found out everybody should be paid the same and all should do all kinds of work. Here, people are equally paid for their labour time: what you offer is what you are paid for. There were disagreements, and the equilibrium was difficult: some people were used to be paid more. But then came international solidarity funds, and the love for what you produce makes you a chemist, a manual worker, even a toilet cleaner. We may lack some skills, but we managed through. (Worker of Vio Me at UniverSSE panel "Financing the solidarity revolution", translated).

The last vital element introduced by the description of Vio Me tackles alienation in the workplace, and the road chosen by the factory workers of Thessaloniki, following Argentinian experiences, was to break the strict worker-machine assignments and introduce rotations. All these decisions are taken in the assembly.

> Everyone does everything in Halikouti. There is no standard [no fixed scheme], as for instance someone working continuously in the kitchen of only waitressing. Everybody can work everywhere. (Worker of Halikouti)

Alienation is acknowledged and addressed by reconfiguring the workplace as a more personalised and 'pleasant' environment. In the establishments of Textiles Pigüé the working pace is fast, yet labourers can pause to share a *mate*[31] or engage a researcher into a deep conversation without any repercussions. Even when on duty, they are free to listen to radio programmes. De-alienation begins from these small improvements and is fully appreciable when realising they feel the workplace belongs to them, it has truly become *their* environment.

[31] A *mate* is a traditional South American drink largely used by Argentinian at any time of the day and usually shared among friends.

Managing revenues, savings and the economics of self-management is not an easy task if considering the lack of institutional support, skills and administrative personnel most of these experiences must deal with. Wages after the recuperation of companies tend to be lower than under an employer, and savings for self-managed co-ops hardly reach the levels of 'regular' businesses of the same kind. Even so, a devotion to the common venture leads to the acceptance of harsher economic results (for a while), yet these are regularly balanced by better working conditions.

> Somehow, we found a way. We set up kinematic networks and we were able to progressively raise the volume of orders. Our means of productions are quite old but for the time being they are enough … and we keep good maintenance! The revenues are distributed as follows: 35% to solidarity compensation, 50% to reinvest, 5% as secured deposit. This repartition was decided together during our assembly (Worker of Vio Me, interview for WOTS?, translated).

Having a group of workers that organise their activities independently and defy the pervasive logic of (private) capital accumulation allows for a better redistribution and reinvestment of revenues. On a micro-economic level, this is the most innovative contribution autogestión brings to the classic theory: these experiences are the living proof that without bosses and profit accumulation they can stand the market prices or even reduce them and decide an amount they consider just.

> We had coffee with milk and pastries at half the price – half of it! – compared to any other place in the area. (Silvia, La Cacerola, my translation)

The downside of this logic is that, none of their member being a capitalist, they hardly have any capital to invest apart from their labour, a few savings and solidarity. The situation severely hinders technological advancement and automation. On top of this, their products – even when recognised as 'different' by their communities – must still compete in the unforgiving and competitive global markets. The desire of an entirely controlled productive chain usually clashes with logistical and financial limits of the WRCs and co-ops. For instance, Textiles Pigüé has recently put on sale their brand of sport t-shirts, of which they control almost every single aspect of the production, yet these constitute only a minor share of their activities and revenues. The remaining part, especially for WRCs, is made of toll processing for other (traditional and capitalist) factories. The outcome is a compromise where equilibrium can be easily lost, and this form of precarity affects both the morale and the physical conditions of the workers. At worst, the external pressures and the internal limitations can make autogestión become self-exploitation. Paraphrasing Francisco Martínez, we

can say that while autogestión turns the economic impositions upside down, allowing for a 'liberation' of the workers, still this space of freedom is hard to defend, both from inside and outside. The economics of autogestión are never an achieved regime but rather imply relentlessly walking on a seldom beaten path. Along this route, mounting freedom goes hand in hand with the persistent risk of finding themselves trapped in a thorny bush of economic constrictions.

Organising Autogestión

What is at stake in autogestión is a re-semanticization of labour: what it is commonly intended by 'work' is deconstructed and rebuilt. At the antipodes of Hume's 'homo economicus', workers in self-organisation opted to take a human path out of an inhuman neoliberal crisis. Once they reached the conclusion that they had to survive and fight back the storm – rather than merely escaping it – the first attempt to reconfigure work relations and their economic life passed through organisational practices. The determination to put their self-organisation presumptions under scrutiny derived from reflections on the previous structures of work-life they experienced. First, thus, came the urgency to reject the pervasive sense of precarity, the frustrations and the profound imbalances experienced when working – or being rejected and unemployed – in the neoliberal market, under the umbrella of a neoliberal state, during two of the worst recent crises: the collapse of the Argentinian economy in 2001 and the destructive wave of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), in Europe, since 2008.

In the previous section, when addressing the economics of autogestión, I tried to artificially separate the financial side from the organisational one. While that part was necessary to touch upon some of the creative economic features, the narrative of autogestión is largely incomplete without considering the organisational and political features driving each of their socio-economical praxes. Money, in short, is not the core reason for these members to carry on their alternative businesses.

> It's a fair thing to have fair payment for your product, but it's not the only thing, the money, the reason I joined this project (Worker of Apo Kinou).

Across this section I will discuss: horizontalism and 'everyone works'; the primacy of the assembly; conflict resolution; de-commodification of labour; openness and fluid membership; and touch upon the debate on the 'commons'.

Horizontalism was conceptually introduced as the main innovative element deriving from a combination of street-level activism and autonomism in labour histories. The immediate translation of horizontalism at workplace level was to erase hierarchical structures. Hence duties, wages, and roles might still be different but concrete equality must be preserved. At a legal level co-ops are required to separate functions, but in practice there should be no one supervising and controlling everyone else. Thus, compared to capitalist businesses with positions of control and subjugated employees, here "everyone works".

> The members of a cooperative are also workers. The President works, the Secretary General works. Everybody is working (Speaker at the Panhellenic Conference in Karditsa, translated)

> Formally we are a normal shop, a normal business, but just in the papers. Because the important thing is the way we actually work, and yes, we knew from the beginning how it would be, you know, totally horizontal. We meet every day [...], and we have every day small meetings like assemblies. (Niovi, Lacandona)

The centrality of the general assembly in the decision-making process has precisely the purpose of sharing rights and duties among all members. More importantly, the assembly is the radical expression of how everyone is entitled to be heard, a crucial missing element in representative democracies. The assembly decides itself how to operate and might undergo changes in time. Consensus might theoretically be the preferred decision-making process at first, but voting can also be necessary depending on the context.

> We realised that if you want to be in a network or create a network with more experiences, or if it's time to be in a great assembly with all these *community cells*, we don't have a problem with voting in order to make a good and quick decision. But, inside our group we try to defend this idea of not voting. And it works. (Worker of Halikouti)

> Legally there are a lot of requisites, for example to have an assembly you must call it 20 days in advance, and give all the members the agenda in advance, and send it to the authorities, etc. And I don't mean all of this is bad, because the aim is to reduce the power of a majority, so you can say these are democratic tools. [...] but in the end these requirements make participation more difficult. So, we organised other things, such as "council meetings" with the associates, which are assemblies with consultative voting. (Silvia, La Cacerola, my translation).

The same suit does not fit all the experiences, workers in self-management recurrently argue. The number of assemblies – whether only a general one or smaller and more encompassing ones; the frequency of these meetings; the nature of decision-making (consensus or voting) are all different

from one group to another. Notwithstanding, they all share the political ethics behind this organisational principle, and the inexorable result are practices of direct democracy, inclusion and transparency.

> The assembly stands above all and everyone [...]. We have one ordinary [assembly] which is the one required by terms of law. But then you can have all the extraordinary assemblies you want. At the beginning, we had many, while today no more than one per month. (Silvia, La Cacerola, my translation).

> The main organ of the cooperative is the big assembly with all the members, that is [held] once a month, and there the decision making is with consensus, we all have to agree. So, there is a lot of talking. It's slow but if we believe this is the only way, we have to work with it. (Worker of Apo Kinou)

The assembly is hence the locus where all the operational decisions, both everyday economics and long-term strategies, take place. The workers' collectives interviewed highly valued the practical outcomes of the long discussions, and that despite the theoretical influences of each participant, the assembly becomes a tool to level discrepancies and reach operational decisions. However, interestingly, *political* discussions can be the propeller of the broader assemblies, provided that a fine balance between theory and practice is always sought.

> We always try to have a result. Not to leave the assembly and say "oh my! We didn't conclude anything today" (Worker of Apo Kinou)

> We have our weekly assemblies every Monday. We talk about the business of the *kafeneion*. And we still have monthly or even every 40 days big assemblies of the cooperative, which are mostly – or we try to have them like this – for political subjects. But these subjects can also be discussed at the weekly assembly. We try to have a balance. (Worker of Halikouti)

In the next section, I will argue that autogestión as such is unfeasible if it does not overflow into acts of prefiguration. Encompassing both organisational praxes and theoretical discussions, the assembly can be regarded as both a means and an end for an overarching political reconceptualization of labour, life, relationships, and dynamics. One example could be found in the process of conflict resolution. Vividly defined as the "down pressure button" by a worker of Apo Kinou, the assembly works on the principle of a face to face, yet collective, confrontation.

> We try to have internal tools to solve the conflicts. For example, we have completely theoretical assemblies where we discuss freely. We can talk about what Apo Kinou ["in common"] means to us, or someone can say "I wasn't happy in the previous assembly that you talked to me in that way". This, for us, is like a down pressure button. We try to have

> these tools to make our communication more stable and without any peaks. And we don't talk only about practice. (Worker of Apo Kinou)

> When a new member comes, if she joins the assembly [straight after] … she will be lost, with 30 people conversing about things she does not know … so there is a welcome group, telling her how the idea started, how we work, how decisions are made. All this process. After, she can start coming and joining the assembly as listener, but without limits. We don't say "come to five assemblies as listener then move onto the next stage". Whenever she feels she wants … You join an assembly, you start to listen, to get more the sense of where we are. After that you, naturally, will start to participate. So the cooperative sucks you in. If you want to be part of it, it sucks you in. If you're only in it for the money … well, normally these people don't have the patience to participate in our talks! At one point they don't come anymore. (Worker of Apo Kinou)

Therefore, once adequate methods to guarantee a constructive environment are laid down, the assembly can succeed in gently imposing collective desires over selfish influences. Keeping this "sweet balance" is one of the most difficult tasks for all the workers in self-management, but if achieved (and constantly renewed) this process can even provoke a disaggregation of fully established economic principles. As in the example of Lacandona, an extremely balanced workforce can eventually reject quantitative measures of work time in favour of a more profound sense of equality.

> We know each other very well but still we're very different. But there is always a very sweet balance, and even if we don't agree we really talk about everything, and we have always found a way … For instance, it's very nice how we can arrange our shifts. For example, when I went away to Mexico [to stay with the Zapatistas in Chiapas] I was away for one month, and there was no problem, the other girls covered my shifts.
> Q. And when you came back you had to work more to catch up?
> A. No! *It's like the water flowing* … I used to say we're very lucky [to have reached this], but it's not that. We fought for this, it's not like it was served to us. And we faced several difficulties to become like this. (Niovi, Lacandona).

The argument above can initially be hard to accept as an egalitarian principle, but I rather suggest analysing it again under the category of 'human and affective economies'. It can thus be interpreted as a decommodification of the workforce (Dinerstein, 2014). It must be noted that this process, when feasible, has higher chances of success in smaller work environments. Here self-management becomes an intimate revolutionary practice. Each collective has reasons to behave differently, yet the example of Lacandona shows a profound acknowledgement and reconceptualization of power dynamics. They decided their labour had to be de-commodified to the point where it was not countable anymore, placing their human and affective needs above market need.

> The income of a worker should be at least partially secured, disconnected to the added value of the production unit in which we operate. In other words: mutualised. To say it differently, this is an historical struggle to de-commodify the workforce. (Benoît Borrits, Association Autogestión, II Euromediterranean)

This decommodification of labour arising in these workers' collectives when processes of de-alienation and re-semanticization are close to completion is far from being state driven. On the contrary, the absence of a controlling authority on the(ir) labour force is crucial to reach such a level of independence allowing them to pursue work decommodification (Clark 2013). Still, they are aware this cannot be fully achieved and taken for granted: these experiences live a constant struggle to seek a better balance, both inside them and in relation to the many destabilising external forces. For every choice they make, they can count on their peers' experiences and try to avoid their errors. But since every autogestión is different in practice, the only possible road to take is a trial and error approach. Paraphrased, these workers can only hope to keep their balance by accumulating best practices, yet in an always mutating scenario that asks for constant re-adaptations. This requires an accurate process of learning by doing.

> In the beginning we wanted to start quickly so, in the first years, certain tasks were covered by who knew better. Then we tried to spread the experience around, and the responsibilities [that come] with it. This has happened quite a few times. And not just assigning someone a new task, but we had to try to self-educate the team, also sometimes asking for external support, through seminars, etc, about how to run the operations. In that sense we have advanced a bit. (Ilias, Syn Allois)

Autogestión in practice also implies that every actor abiding by its philosophy must inevitably become a sponge sucking in every bit that might fortify its experience. At the same time, openness and sharing are inescapable for the common survival. Kostas Nicolau (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki) argued that "we need a holistic approach to create a social circle" (UniverSSE, Day 2, translated) of mutual learning and common preservation. Even if the assembly is horizontalism put in practice, and learning by doing an essential tool to keep the balance, both are deemed insufficient without two other prefigurational elements of autogestión: openness and commoning.

'Open' is a recurring word in self-management, yet its practical importance tends to be underestimated in favour of other theoretical elements. If anything, tangible openness to the community grants the workers the social and economic support they desperately need, and disclosing the relations with their peers fuel everyone's small revolutions. Not only did the faculty

studying workers' recuperations opt for naming itself 'open' (Facultad Abierta) but they introduced the concept of 'open factories' (Ruggeri 2014a), remarking their alterity vis à vis the closed doors of capitalist establishments. Open thus means transparent, intended both as an ethical value and a visible feature. The doors of the recuperated factories are barricaded when there are attempts at eviction, but open for anyone interested, supporting or respectfully curious for the experience. Another fascinating example of openness is the report "Five years of Pagkaki" (2014) released to the public by the Athens based collective in 2014. In the publication the group describes the internal modifications throughout that length of time, but rather than hiding their downturns, they expose them with outstanding rigour. The purpose is to be transparent to society, and to share lessons for other collectives to learn.

> In July 2014 four members announced their withdrawal for political disagreements. [...] We believe that the causes of the rupture are complex. [...] This led Pagkaki to a complicated and painful internal conflict, extremely harmful for its continuity. There was self-criticism inside the team. We believe that opening to the public these key issues can be beneficial for all, and we invite you to contribute to the discussion. (5 Years of Pagkaki, my translation).

Openness allows them to avoid the risk of becoming self-referential. Furthermore, their wish to be transparent in front of their communities makes them trustworthy actors even when they promote radical political ideas. Openness is also a criterion allowing exchanges between self-managed groups: I argue that in their re-conceptualisation membership becomes more fluid and inter-dependency possible. In the above case of Pagkaki, they covered up for the withdrawal of members by calling other collectives and using the network of Kolektives. During the interview, one current member of Halikouti recalled of when he decided to move from Crete to Athens to work for Pagkaki during those times. Members of Lacandona, Perivolaki and other collectives covered up for the shift in Pagkaki for a year and half, until new members were included, and the original situation restored (Pagkaki 2014). Even beyond this permanent solution, some original members of Halikouti moved permanently to Pagkaki and vice-versa.

Membership, or the associative form, differs significantly from one group to another, as well as entry and exit criteria. Nevertheless, all the experiences here presented saw a renewal in their workforce, including new elements from society, and with others leaving the group. Openness can be appreciated when listening to their honest considerations of their limits. For instance, the

inclusion of new members is seen as a proactive choice to reinvigorate their fading energy for autogestión.

> In the beginning we had a passionate group, and then conflicts started. The closed team of 10 people began to have issues inside … we put so many borders around us, and we couldn't stand them anymore. But then, as soon as new people became involved, they shook us up. You need to evolve, or you need to find new people coming in, because they will broaden your collective vision, giving you new energy. That was a very critical moment of our history. So, you need to expand, you cannot afford to stay at the same level for a long time. (Worker of Apo Kinou)

> First of all, a person does not become part of the cooperative according to the years of [his/her] unemployment. It does not have to do with that. We consider the collective like an ecosystem. Every ecosystem needs functioning parts to work together properly. So, if one part has to leave, it has to be replaced. […] When a new member comes to the cooperative, there is a 6 months training, where she has to participate in all our working groups, in order for her to decide what she wants to do. After this, we have a period you must commit to work in the cooperative. An obligation. There is an assembly [that accepts or rejects the new member] and after that you are committed to be here for at least two and a half years, no less. You have to announce to the assembly when you want to withdraw at least 6 months in advance, to give us time to look for a replacement. (Worker of Halikouti)

According to neoliberal economics, the predominant idea is that of constant production expansion and revenues growth as the only way to keep your business alive in the shark vs shark market competition. On the contrary, when the worker of Apo Kinou says they need to 'keep expanding' he refers to: including new people as fresh energies (to replace old and tired); including new ideas, and keeping their project alive by maintaining them in a constant motion. The detrimental thought of constant growth in productivity is turned upside down to become constant expansion and regeneration of ideas and praxes.

When summarising their point of view, both for what concerns economics and organisation, many among these workers feel their projects belong to the "philosophy of commons". Autogestión is believed to be the "common ownership of the property and work", where "no worker should be a shareholder and no shareholder should be worker" (Worker of Vio Me, UniverSSE, translated). Linebaugh (2008) argued that rather than the noun, 'commons', we should use the verb, 'commoning'. The latter shifts the focus to the collective activity, pointing to a system of social interaction instead of a resource or a distribution mechanism. As such, it makes it much easier to

discern the potential of commoning for social transformation. Azzellini (2016) expands on this remarking that "the outcome depends on specific deliberate practices of commoning and the context in which they take place. To rule out that the fruits of the commons are appropriated by others in order to extract surplus value and that commons become a privilege reserved to a small and wealthy minority, it is necessary to tether the concept of the commons to equality" (p.32). His argument is in line with the interpretation here offered, which partially accepts the conceptualisation of commons but regards it as insufficient to offer an overarching interpretative key. The commons must hence be understood not as a thing, but rather from the point of view of the social relations that shape them, in a constant movement. If we see commons just as economic goods (Ostrom et al. 1999) or immaterial goods (Hardt and Negri 2009), we miss completely the social relations that constantly produce them, which are at the centre of the discourse. The production of the commons is "above all, a social relation" (Aguilar 2017, p.85). The discussion is clearly open and ongoing even for the workers themselves.

> We spent many years talking about common property, but we have never defined this concept. The innovation brought from the economy of the workers to this concept is to deny private property in practice. (Benoit Borrits, Association Autogestión, VI Encuentro, my translation)

I preserve the concept of 'commoning', as a verb, for a further discussion on how these experiences overflow into their community (see Chapter 7). Yet, keeping the focus on what autogestión means in terms of human experience, I rather intend to embrace the interpretative key of 'prefiguration'.

Prefiguring through Practice

In this last section I argue that autogestión is a form of praxes-driven prefiguration. By this I mean that autogestión is not just a way to organise labour or interpret relations. It comes with un-learning, unblocking and reconceptualising work and sociality, by and large rejecting assimilated standpoints. As such, its purpose is to anticipate, in praxis, the world we fashion. Using their power-to-be, these workers are shaping 'concrete utopias' (2015) that are nothing less than a present-yet-to-come.

Prefiguration can be understood as the art of translating the organisational practice into something political and ethical, in this case proposing a way out of neoliberalism which is both theoretical and tangible, anticipating the world that might come (*Ibid.*). Acts and praxes employed and theorised by the workers in self-management prefigure the kind of socio-economic environment they strive for.

By considering autogestión as a form of prefiguration we should discuss the meaning of affective politics, of freedom, of creative resistance (both public and private). These are the key anticipatory features for the workers and their utopian, yet pragmatic, desires.

> You represent the part of Europe that wants to give up with that system of death that is capitalism (Ruggeri, II Euromediterranean, my translation)
>
> In the current circumstances, we believe that labour collectives are facing a double challenge: to identify the horizons and the conditions for a transition to another economic organisation of production and, secondly, to evolve the practices and to break the boundaries in order to make their political character even more radical. (5 Years of Pagkaki, translated).

When collecting the opinions of Greek self-managed workers, Kokkinidis (2012) observed that "This emphasis on prefiguration derives from members' belief that the solution to the current crisis of democracy is not the strengthening of representation but the creation of viable structures to broader and radicalize democracy" (p.247). Significantly, Maeckelbergh (2011, p.89) views prefiguration as "a process of determining the ends as well as the means". The emphasis is on the process, and on how it might nurture liberation hopes through libertarian practices. Maecklebergh (2009, p.66) then develops this concept when saying that "trying to make the processes we use to achieve our immediate goals and embodiment of our ultimate goals, so that there is no distinction between how we fight and what we fight for" is at the core of prefigurative politics in action.

Prefiguration also means affective politics, or *politica afectiva*, intended as "a way of transforming the world by connecting with our own emotions about what is wrong, and fight against the rationalisation of political action that distance ourselves from our humanity and dignity" (Dinerstein 2015, p.138). 'Affective' in the sense of an internal tension for a loving attitude towards the neighbour, without any moral imperative. 'Political' since it raises the level of mutual commitment, and it releases shared ethics of engagement. It springs from the most repressed need and the liberating private realisation that any voice can and must be heard, and everyone can

engage in the process. I argue that prefiguration can only exceed from a terrain of affective politics, while it vanishes when mutual commitment is forcingly imposed by any institutional actor.

> I have been part of other assemblies in the past and of other political groups, nevertheless mixing the politics with my working life – the fact that I have to make a living out of this job – made me reconsider the balances. And I really rate trust between the members very high. […] I think that, in our collective, the way to do it is the art of compromising between members that trust each other, but this is just the basis. We'll never compromise with people we don't trust. Nevertheless, once trust is accomplished, it is the art of compromising that allows people to proceed even when they have different … not different views, but different ways. This is one thing I learned. (Worker of Tzepeto)

One remarkable aspect of autogestión is the impact it can have at the level of the self. As emphasised by several interviewees, as well as recorded by scholars of the field (de San Vicente, Iñaki Gil 2015, 25-39; Carretero Miramar 2010; Castronovo 2018), the possibility of managing one's own present in a shared and committed way is rewarding and fulfilling. Affective economies shape the common adventure of these workers by raising the level of belongingness.

> It's one of the most fulfilling experiences of my life, definitely. […] We had really strong moments of joy and solidarity with the opportunity to meet wonderful people that support us. The experience of sharing everything, the positive and the negative … because it is also very difficult [to be in] this constant struggle to survive economically … but you share the stress! It's stressful but you can share it. […] It's also very important because you feel comfortable with yourself. (Niovi, Lacandona)

Arampatzi (2014) calls it 'affective solidarity', while for Dinerstein (2014) these are affective politics that "defies the separation between the being and the social". It comprises Bloch's 'collaboration of feelings' (Bloch 1986), 'being singular plural' (Nancy 2000) and recalls Spinoza's relationship between mind and body, that "is not one of causal interaction but one of identity" (Rosenthal 2000, p.7). Dinerstein (2015) summarises the impact that affective politics have on the self when arguing that "an adequately understood emotion (affect) makes a person an agent of self-knowledge". The acts of love and affection introduced in the formerly austere work environment bring freedom to its participants in the sense of self-determination: "to be free is … to cause things to happen according to our understating of the way things are and ought to be" (*Ibid.*, p.16). The kind of love enacted by these workers is neither an abstract feature of humanity nor prescribed solidarity. With the mediation of what Bloch referred to as 'educated hope' (Bloch 1986), love and affection become political being "internally compelling … and empowering ethics of commitment" (Critchley 2013, p.39).

Learning to care, to trust and to acquire a sense of belongingness are hence interpreted as political outcomes of the affective prefiguration. Freedom can be described as the definitive goal of this anticipatory process.

> This is something we desired as a work project but also a life project. In a regular job you work in your shifts and you don't need to learn unless told to do so. In a cooperative it's different, because you're the one in charge. The products need to come out fine [...] and if a machine gets broken, you need to stay after your shift to fix it. Because your job is up to you. And for these reasons I believe you need a conscience, a sense of belongingness. This costs a lot [of effort], and every time it costs more. But I believe we have advanced much with this, even though it was never easy. (Silvia, La Cacerola, my translation).

Another element that inhabits the process of autogestión is creativity. As Azzellini (2015) says "When workers are in control of the work they do, work is a means of self-expression. The creative capacity inherent in every human being is unleashed in the labour activity" (p.18). "What workers' control points to is more than just a new way of organising production; it is also the release of human creative energy on a vast scale" (Wallis 2011, p.10).

Creativity, together with its respective substantive creation, are critical forces pushing prefiguration. The workers in self-management are disposed to embody a creative potential, as they are in the right position to de-objectify their creations and rediscover a sense of belongingness.

> Karl Marx didn't say that power is having the means of productions, and so controlling the distribution. [Having just that] keeps us in this state of mind of being employers-slaves, without understanding what we are actually producing and doing, without the feeling of creation. [...] A great part of what I'm describing was already being described long time ago, but today, in this very historical moment, we decided to take the means of production *and* become responsible [...], to make our own collective creation and *love what we make*. (Worker of Vio Me, VI Encuentro, translated, my italic)

Creativity can be regarded as the most perfect fruit of the process of learning by doing combined with openness to the community. In the last decade the term composed a mantra (together with 'brainstorming') for hi-tech companies such as Google and Facebook (Karakas and Manisaligil 2012), which – I claim – interpret creativity as the act performed by the highly pressured employee to invent any (unethical) measure to prevail in the never forgiving competition with their commercial rivals (Henton and Held 2013). I propose, instead, a re-appropriation of the concept for the dictionary of modern labour resistance. Creativity is the art of questioning and dismantling

established principles, keeping the useful parts and reassembling them with new ones, aiming to have more resistant tools to face the crises and restore hope. Creativity is a bridge between practices and prefiguration.

> The general assembly of the members of the Health Center is a space of creative discussions, of extroverted actions, [...] of the connections with social movements and other collectives in Greece as well as abroad. The assembly comprises the members of the Health Center and the workers of Vio Me, but is always open to anyone, experts or not, who want to participate, support the initiative, advance proposals to better connect health and work. (VioMe Clinic presentation on their website, my translation from Italian)

Considering the main theoretical categories behind workers' prefiguration, the counterpart of 'creativity' should reasonably be 'resistance'. Neoliberalism must be tackled twice, they suggest, once by breaking boundaries and thinking outside the box, and another time by protecting the circumscribed amount of freedom and independence obtained with the former action. Most of the WRCs regularly face physical evictions, likewise workers' co-ops need to protect themselves from a multitude of external attacks. The nature of the experiences of self-management is to immediately become projects of resistance against the violence of austerity and the oppression of neoliberalism.

> We know that in this moment the experiences of autogestión, especially in Latin America, but also here in Europe and anywhere in the world, are not only alternatives but mainly resistances. Resistance to precarity, to informality, to the recurrent expulsion of workers from the wage system, to the growing fragmentation of the forms of labour that is being provoked by capitalism in its contemporary form, global and neoliberal. From this point of view, and considering the peculiar experiences of Argentina, [...] Greece and other countries, self-management arises as a form to resist that exclusion, that precarisation, that tertiarization ... but at the same time is a kind of resistance not aiming to reproduce something from the past, but instead creating something different. (Ruggeri, Il Euromediterranean, my translation).

This kind of creative resistance brings echoes of that un-learning process (Motta 2011) that opens the way to unpredictable reconstructions. During the observations on the field it was relatively easy to spot elements of creativity – as in the re-adaptation of the working space to the different physical and psychological needs of the workers – while it was almost impossible to directly observe when these have been theoretically conceived. Therefore, interviews allowed a reconstruction of the moment of 'unblocking', and identify its causes. An example, among hundreds of tiny theoretical *cracks*, is provided here below.

> The CIC came to Heraklion [...] and when they talked to us it was like "oh! bright lights coming!" For example, a very simple things they said to us. We were like "we have all the time different opinions, different ways, different and different and different ..." He said: "stop telling me 'different', take the word 'different' out and put the word 'common' instead. What do you have in common?". They told us one, two, three things that ... unblock your mind. Like how a healthy assembly should work, to have a coordinator, to release pressure, etc. Because lots of time you are circling around, and you do not seem to be able to get out of it. (Worker of Apo Kinou)

The reconstruction of the worker of Apo Kinou points straightforwardly to an act of un-learning accompanied by a further moment of re-conceptualisation. It also alludes to important associations and knowledge transfer between the experiences that will be later discussed as 'reverberations'.

Autogestión as prefiguration is a pragmatic exercise that leads into the unknown, therefore its consequences become unpredictable. In the words of Ince "to prefigure is to embrace the conviviality and joy that comes with being together as radical equals, not as vanguards and proletariat on the path towards the transcendental empty promise of utopia or 'no place', but as the grounded immanence of the here and now of actually making a new world 'in the shell of the old' and the perpetual hard work and reaffirmation that this requires (Ince 2012)" (Springer and Gahman 2016, p.9).

The gist of this investigation is not to describe a hypothetical future where all self-organised workers operate in a free society and they are all equal. There is no promised land, and workers do acknowledge that. On the contrary, the struggle will be constant and, for what they know today, never-ending. It is therefore a matter of expanding the limited but acquired freedoms, infecting others, reinforcing what they have today. The transformative potential is already here, it is immanent, and it is emergent. It is a matter of being able to recognise it and fuel it (Bergman and Montgomery 2017).

Recurrently, during the interviews with these actors, a void space emerges and becomes visible for its absence: almost none of them infers at political positionings – as in referring to: parties, ideologies, leaders –, not even when unfolding their private point of view. Two are the most fascinating implications for this: firstly, as above described, autogestión surely benefits from a long labour tradition, but at the same time prefiguration makes it break with the predictable, the acquired, the safe and established. Secondly, this autonomy in thinking and acting is transferred from the private to the public and back.

> We think we are part of a society that needs to fight for a change, to become a more just society, more egalitarian, with much more solidarity. Someone calls it socialism … *we do not discuss about names*. Some of us come from a political tradition … and even if I think this is something unrelated with traditional socialism … at the same time, I won't discuss about the political definition of this. Still, we are part of a movement that tries to change society, and we surely acknowledge that. (Silvia, La Cacerola, my translation)

The private becomes public in the sense that one's own political ideology is irrelevant unless jointly practiced and shared. Therefore, it becomes blended into the mutual context of the self-managed environment, piloted for common goals and needs, its rigidity melts under the sun of constructive pragmatism. Conversely, the public becomes private by reassigning to one's own political philosophy mutually established (and constantly re-examined) features. The argument that autogestión (in practice) as prefiguration (in theorising) generate new political players and an innovative political culture is built upon the significance of this double process.

> At a personal level, it is about how you bring your political views in action. You sum up to the personal level, and collectivise the personal knowledge you have, putting it on a collective level. (Worker of Halikouti).

> We kind of talk about politics … but for Tzepeto it's kind of strange, because most of us are member of an antifascist group, so a lot of issues are 'solved'. But when a new member wants to join the collective, we discuss it and we always talk about their political views. So, it's rare to have an extreme Stalinist and an extreme Anarchist in the group. But even so, we're trying to create a common culture apart from our own … fantasies of utopias. (Worker of Tzepeto)

Prefiguration covers different ground in the action and theorisation of these workers, sometimes reconnecting the past to become capable of addressing the future. It can be argued that prefiguration does not sufficiently consider the hard challenges these workers must go through, the limitations and, above all, the many unsuccessful experiences. The most common criticism is that their dreams and utopias will eventually fade and vanish succumbing under the forces of capitalism. For critics like Harvey (2017) the solution can only be another dose of state power helping these fragile bottom-up forces. He is quick to dismiss non-hierarchical organisations and horizontal politics as "greasing the rails for an assured neoliberal future. Yet in his pessimism he entirely misunderstands prefigurative politics, which are a means not to an end, but only to future means" (Springer and Gahman 2016, p.8).

Focussing on the prefigurative potential does not imply denying difficulties or contradictions. Nevertheless, as Gibson-Graham (1997) have argued, scholars can do something *political* by stop talking only about neoliberalism and prioritise alternatives in their studies. This goes along with de Sousa Santos (2015) and the epistemology of the South according to which we should make these alterities emerge from the invisible *precisely* to reinforce them. The idea is not to forget about or ignore neoliberalism altogether, but "to instead set about getting on with our writing about other things" (Springer and Gahman 2016, p.7). Writing is (or can reasonably be) a political activity, and as Springer here advocates, the aim of this research is to steer the attention from the problem to the potential solution, and from the known to the yet-to-be.

Even recognising these experiences are born out of the eruptions of rage and denial observed in Greece after the imposition of neoliberal reforms, we could attempt to go beyond the analysis of the cause and consider the most anticipatory germs surviving *despite* it. Then, we could identify the actors behind some of the most creative and effective organisational forms of reactions. This exercise can be repeated in almost every context. "We need to turn away from neoliberalism and towards ourselves, to begin the difficult – but also joyous – work of managing our affairs for ourselves" (Purcell 2016, p.620). In the end, autogestión is prefiguration because it leaves the apathy behind, and takes energy from the future. This, I argue, is a process we should learn from these workers, embracing their dreamful but concrete imaginary for a different society.

5. Recuperations

Autogestión is a process that intrinsically points to the future, as described in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, I argue that its backbone is made of 'recuperated' pieces from a rich history of labour resistance and cooperativism. Its robustness is given by the capacity of self-managed experience to acknowledge this past, reinterpret it and apply it in a new key.

In this field of study, 'recuperation' is a term recurrently linked to Workers *Recuperated* Companies. As such, it indicates that the once employed and now 'free' labourers take the factory in their own hands and restart the production, as in the mantra 'Occupy, Resist, Produce'. Hence, 'recuperating' a factory is a synthesis of the three words, covering the ground from when they break the locks to enter the building to producing and selling their own goods under self-management.

The core argument of this chapter is that all the subjects here considered – from co-ops to WRCs, from small Cretan cafeterias to huge textile industries in Argentina – are entangled in a process of recuperation. Still, by using this term I expand the common meaning described above to comprehend all the attempts of reconnecting, reassembling and giving new value to fragments of local – Greek and Argentinian – labour histories, to the tradition of cooperativism, to ancient predecessors and forgotten resistances. They 'recuperate' when they gather and combine pieces of the past to build the foundations to stand up in the present.

Yet, their recuperation is not sufficient on its own to exist and resist as alterities. My claim is that they act on the recuperated fragments using their prefigurative capacity intrinsic in autogestión. Paraphrasing, I argue that their aim is not limited to reproducing past experiences of labour resistance, but rather to make good use of previous attempts to prefigure an alternative 'model' for the present. In doing so, they attribute utmost importance to autonomy, which I see as the innovative and prefigurative component superimposed over recuperations.

This chapter begins by reflecting on the legal and *real* nature of these subjects. Vieta labels them 'new cooperatives', and I dig into the reasons for this, considering their partial refusal of 'cooperativism' as well as the similarities between their experiences and ancient predecessors. I then move to the labour and cooperative history of Greece aiming to shed lights on the *ethical*

predecessors of this movement. This historical recapitulation serves to spot when and under which conditions, through time, fragments of current autogestión emerged and resisted. A similar exercise is conducted for Argentina, allowing for a first comparison between the two countries' rich histories of repression, as well as counter-hegemonic successes and failures. The aim is to explain how different recuperations took place in the two scenarios, generating similar but not identical processes of autogestión today.

Autonomy is key to understanding how these recuperated fragments are taken forward. The experience of the *Piqueteros* in Argentina is considered vital to spot the vein of autonomy running under the skin of these new cooperatives. Nevertheless, I will argue that contextual and cultural elements play such a significant role in the two countries that autonomy becomes something different in Argentina to that in Greece. For this section, the ethnographic approach of the 'slow methodology' and observations were crucial to have a glimpse of the culturally driven direction of autogestión in the Hellenic country vis à vis the one in Argentina.

New Wave and Old School

This section considers the comparability between the self-managed workplaces studied and the ancient forms of cooperativism, starting from the observation of Merli (2017) that "self-management can be operationalised as a tool to rethink contemporary cooperativism" (p.1). Here I suggest that by reconnecting autogestión to the origins of the cooperative movement, we could potentially reinvigorate modern cooperativism itself, which seems to have lost its path.

Once labelled with the name autogestión the range of common anti-systemic actions and theorisations of these workers, we are left with an important question: who are, then, these subjects? We are told most of them are, at least legally, cooperatives. Yet, many prefer to be identified, morally, as workers' collectives, communities or something else.

Their predominant legal definition is that of cooperatives, yet, as anticipated, such categorisations stands only so that they could be recognisable by the market and the institutions (De Peuter and Dyer-Witheford 2010). The brand 'cooperative', thus, would be purely instrumental to them, as a 'legal box'. A worker of Apo Kinou told me "we just needed a legal tool to work with". This is only one side of the coin, since at the core of these experiences we find an ethical attitude close to that

of some 'old school' cooperatives of the 19th century. So far, scholar and workers have not yet identified a common name for their movement[32], and perhaps a fascinating intellectual challenge would be to conceive an original encompassing definition for them.

Vieta (2014b) is among the few who tried to answer the question: how should we name who is *behind* autogestión? His interpretation not only sets the basis for a clearer positioning of these subjects amidst labour theories and histories, but hints at their capacity to recuperate. Vieta opted to label them 'new cooperatives', thus demonstrating the word 'cooperative' can be prudently used when dealing with this matter, whereas 'new' is the necessary particle that – paradoxically – separates them from the contemporary common understanding of what a cooperative is. The argument is that, animated by autogestión, new cooperativism is distinguishable by five features. Firstly, "it emerges as a direct response by working people or grassroots groups to the crisis of the neoliberal model" (p. 799). Secondly, despite its name the workers involved do not necessarily embrace the cooperative tradition and are instead moved by an impellent need to survive amidst the crisis. The latter is interpreted as a fuel that ignited the praxes of autogestión and brought to the foundation of new co-ops.

The third feature of new co-ops is their ability to bring politics back to the daily-praxes arena, thus looking for a solution for the crisis *among themselves* rather than staring up at someone else's in charge. Forth, 'new cooperativism' comprises but is not limited to "practices of horizontalized labour processes [...], culturally and gender-sensitive divisions of labour; and more egalitarian schemes of surplus allocation, certainly when compared to capitalist production, and even when compared to older or more traditional cooperative experiences" (p. 799). In the previous chapter I touched upon some of these features of autogestión to reason about its complex unicity. Here the focus will be on how much these practices resemble or distance themselves from the cooperativist ones. Fifth, Vieta (2014) argues that rather than behaving like closed businesses, 'new co-ops' have much stronger connections with their communities, embracing common social objectives.

[32] Interestingly, the English name given to their international meeting is that of "Workers' Economy Gathering", with two implications: firstly, they are not a closed group nor sectarian, but open to every worker; secondly, despite their peculiar organisational and ethical approaches, they perceive themselves just as 'workers', sending out a political statement of what 'work' should mean for everyone.

If these workers have almost nothing to share with cooperativism, then why use this definition? A possible answer would be that, in fact, most of their features recall traditional cooperativist's precepts:

1) Membership is voluntary and open (cooperatives are always open to new members);
2) Democratic control by the membership (members vote on all important decisions according to the principle of "one member, one vote", regardless of the capital contribution made by each member, or his or her role in the cooperative);
3) Economic participation by members, both as solidarity owners of the cooperative and as participants in the decision-making concerning profit distribution;
4) Autonomy and independence in relation to the state and other organizations;
5) A commitment to educating cooperative members to help them participate more effectively;
6) Cooperation among cooperatives through local, national and worldwide organizations;
7) Contribution to the development of the community in which the cooperative is located (Birchall 1997).

Beyond the five points of Vieta, we already observed how these subjects operate in an open and transparent manner towards their members entrance, exit and circulation (point 1); they abide by the principle of horizontality or direct democracy (as in point 2); the assembly is their decisional forum where members have the right to decide upon their profit distribution (3); many of these experiences either have incorporated spaces for the community education (*bachilleratos populares*, in Argentina) or are involved in promoting and hosting political-educational events (both in Greece and Argentina) (as per points 5 and 7); and they are wholly oriented at cooperating with one another as exemplified by the recurrence of their national, regional and global meetings and the relentless synergetic efforts (6).

Lastly, point 4 touches upon what is perhaps the most striking recommendation: cooperatives must be autonomous in relation to the state and other organisations. Autonomy, as discussed in detail later, can be either 'neutral/passive' (as in the view of Owen), or 'partisan/active' (as interpreted by these subjects). Whether subject to interpretation, autonomy still emerges as a prominent feature, and a truly ground-breaking one. Furthermore, it can be reasonably argued that autonomy is the characteristic that modern cooperatives have lost at all (Patronis and Papadopoulos 2002; Sharzer 2017). If anything, autonomy is the feature that characterises the workers' self-managed businesses we here investigate. To complete the picture, it can be noted how many modern cooperatives with prominent financial status (especially in the Global North)

have progressively instituted vertical structures denying the principle of democratic control; they became profit-driven businesses abandoning any implicit ethic; and beyond the loss of autonomy they are as distant as ever to the contributing to the development of their communities (Nasioulas, Ioannis 2012; Hahnel 2013; Cheney et al. 2014). It is no wonder that the workers in autogestión do not look kindly upon being recognised as 'cooperatives'.

The comparison between the principles of cooperativism and the behaviour of 'new cooperatives', in synthesis, leaves us with a mesmerising impression: workers in autogestión abide by the principles of cooperativism *more than* many contemporary cooperatives themselves. Looking for evidence of this, we must first re-examine the origins of cooperativism, and then see how it rooted, evolved and mutated in both Greece and Argentina. In short, we wonder whether the seeds of *autogestión* were already present in the cooperativist tradition aiming to catch sight of when and why they got lost.

The roots of the solidarity-cooperative economy can be traced back to the initial stages of the Industrial Revolution, when the precursors of anti-hegemonic labour praxes embarked on collaborative experiences (Mumford 1922), the so-called 'utopias of the nineteenth century' (Polanyi 2001). Workers' cooperatives have been at the centre of a debate throughout the last two centuries, from the first experiment of New Lanark, to Mondragon (Latinne 2014). Their role and significance in the struggle against capital is disputed, and Marx himself took them into consideration, recognising both their potential and their limits. Jossa (2005) noted how despite the widespread belief of Marxism as being intrinsically antagonist to cooperativism – for their allegedly *partial* commitment to a revolutionary goal – Marx "declared himself strongly in favour of cooperative firms, maintaining that their generalised introduction would result in a new production mode. At different times in his life, he even seems to have been confident that cooperatives would eventually supplant capitalistic firms altogether" (p.3). It is worth recalling his famous quote on the cooperative model:

> The co-operative factories run by workers themselves are, within the old form, the first examples of the emergence of a new form, even though they naturally reproduce in all cases, in their present organization, all the defects of the existing system, and must reproduce them. But the opposition between capital and labour is abolished there, even if at first only in the form that the workers in association become their own capitalists, i.e., they use the means of production to valorise their labour. These factories show how, at a

> certain stage of development of the material forces of production, and of the social forms of production corresponding to them, a new mode of production develops and is formed naturally out of the old (Marx 1991, pp.571-572).

Notably, the workers in autogestión carefully reject the definition of themselves as being "their own capitalists". The praxis-driven anarchist approach allows to spot, here, a whole subversion of the implicit verticality of Marxism. What the workers recuperated, instead, are organisational skills of ancient cooperativism, and amidst these praxes they seemed to have found early forms of horizontalism that, ultimately, defy Marxist's predictions. Hence, it can be claimed that Marx clearly recognise the emancipatory potential of these actors *within* the old form, still he underestimated their capacity of profound reinterpretation of labour structures.

Considering Robert Owen, the so-called inventor of the cooperative experience, it is interesting to observe that its projection was to have a multiplicity of local communities formed by workers and their families, eventually aggregating in a federation (Morton, Arthur Leslie 1978). Not surprisingly, the idea of what today we interpret as community outreach was already present: Owen believed in the construction of a community of workers and citizen coming together for a common project – better if emerging from bottom-up necessities and with democratic participation – which is very relevant for today's experiences. William Thompson, with his influential contribution to workers' cooperative interpretation (1827), believed in 'communities of mutual cooperation' as a starting point of the working class struggle. These theoretical precepts have been clearly absorbed by contemporary subjects.

More importantly Thompson, and particularly his *Labour Rewarded* (1827) radicalised Owen's theories by eliminating the 'paternal benefactors' figure: in his interpretation, workers' cooperatives are functioning elements just with autonomous internal self-coordination. Another burden the workers can get rid of by themselves is the notion that human nature requires competition to achieve common goals, he argues. The role of solidarity and cooperation emerges powerfully from his writings. We should keep in mind Thompson's view when considering contemporary autogestión: the mantra 'working without bosses' perfectly summarises its conclusions, despite belonging to a different era.

Whist being depicted as interesting experiments to challenge the economic *status quo*, cooperatives are on the contrary often seen as places of unexpressed revolutionary potential, of

Don Quixotesque nature, or even worse, as pleasant to capital, perfect to unleash the revolutionary fury into easily controllable elements that will, sooner or later, become part of the market system. Organisations that pursue 'noble' aims do not necessarily become resisting structures just because of the alterity they claim to embody. We must always be aware that cooperatives born under a good sign might end up abiding by the "iron law of oligarchy" (Georgiou 1973, p.292), reducing to minimum terms their innovative potential to survive the logics of business and capitalism. Furthermore, a cooperative can turn into something completely different from its original definition, when pretending to act radically while just aiming at convincing alternative consumers. Reformists and theorisers of the Social Enterprise tend to interpret cooperativism as a model to correct market failures and steer towards a 'responsible capitalism" (Bull et al. 2010). Such a view is here considered detrimental to the original anti-hegemonic nature of cooperativism.

In their defence, workers' cooperatives proved to possess forms of *agency* and to play a potentially significant role to change society for the better. The precondition, however, is not to stand the very logic of capital, by moving beyond wages, hours and working conditions demands, and entering the realm of owning and maintain production, as factory councils tried to do (Morton 2007). Escaping the predetermined conditions of the neo-liberal market, workers' cooperatives can create economic, human and social capital (Majee and Hoyt 2011), promoting a democratic development that is people-centred (Nunes 2012). Gramsci, referring to workers' cooperatives, adds that they generate a movement that can escape subordination (what he called the 'passive revolution') and begin a revival of working-class cultural and political emergence, meaning they can pull the struggle ahead (Morton 2007). Beside what is at stake for labour conditions, cooperatives must also be considered for their how they respond to "human necessities".

> "In *Capital* the only real attention to cooperation is an examination of cooperative activities as forms and consequences of factory production, where workers "merely form a particular mode of existence of capital" (Marx 1845, p.451). Here we want to know how people cooperate in the process of providing their material subsistence *but also* such very human necessities as shared communications, collective joy, and the formation of solidarity within communal spaces" (Grubacic and O'Hearn 2016, p.3).

From this reconstruction we can see that, whilst conscious of the contradictions and 'deviations', there is a branch of the cooperativist theorisations that falls close to autogestión. De Peuter and Dyer-Witheford (2010) take the cue from this stream to argue that amongst contemporary cooperatives we find actors capable of becoming commons and performing acts of commoning.

"The history of the worker cooperative movement provides a practical demonstration of the art of collective association key to all commoning practices. It also offers an example of decentralized control of common resources that potentially connects the traditions of labour struggle to the modes of activism honed by both ecological and networked radicals" (De Peuter and Dyer-Witheford 2010, p.32). Their intriguing perspective can be merged with the above-mentioned proposal of Merli according to whom *autogestión* can revitalise cooperativism. Therefore, with a syncretic attempt, we can dare proposing the 'new principles', beyond the 'seven', that these 'new cooperatives' should possess to revitalise this category of workers associationism. These principles derive from the field observations of autogestión and contain the elements that could help put cooperativism back on its ethico-political feet:

1) Horizontalism must be practiced and preserved – in line with Vieta's "collective ownership of social, cultural, or economic production; culturally and gender-sensitive division of labour; and more egalitarian schemes of surplus allocation" (p. 779). The workers of the Canadian Federation also interpret this in the key of a constantly increasing democracy in the workplace[33]. Kasmir (1996) notes that unless when questioning the existence of vertical structures of power, we perpetrate inequalities, apathy, and oppression, leading to the "reemergence of class division" (Hahnel 2013, pp.354-355). Lastly, being a member of a new cooperative should be a gratifying experience, unleashing the "social productive power" needed to realize participants' "species being", or broadly, their interconnection with other humans (De Peuter and Dyer-Witheford 2010, p.34).
2) Capital has to be the servant of the labourers[34] – encompassing both the "distribution of profits to all those who have a hand in generating them" (Fairbairn 1994, p.20) and providing "the best possible employment conditions for the members"[33]. Beyond the different choices in terms of wages and surplus, the prerequisite for all should be a "[c]ommitment to distributive justice"(De Peuter and Dyer-Witheford 2010, p.37).
3) New cooperatives should be movement-building actors – De Peuter and Dyer-Witheford (2010) insist on the necessity for these subjects to collaborate and intertwine with other

[33] https://canadianworker.coop/about/what-is-a-worker-co-op/

[34] https://canadianworker.coop/about/statement-of-co-operative-identity/

promoters of the commons-commoning "[f]rom the perspective of cultivating economic autonomy" (p.39). This movement-building capacity exceeds the principles of cooperation among cooperatives;

4) New co-ops must be at the service of the community – linguistically, this complete turning upside down the vertical relation: capital-co-ops-community. Commoning is reinforced when these actors are capable of connecting with their *moral* peers *beyond* the networks of workplaces in struggle. By this I mean that only with an exercise of intertwinement with their communities these 'cooperatives' become 'new'. Unlike the old, they need communal energy with which they become able to make autogestión expand over the walls of their workplaces.
5) Active/partisan autonomy is essential – this last principle implies that new cooperatives must be or become *political* actors. The concept of 'neutral' autonomy is here openly challenged. If Owen was advocating for cooperatives performing their duties untouched by institutional influences, new cooperativism aims at creatively resisting and transforming their communities *against* the forces of capital and institutions. While the former was passive resistance, this is active. If cooperativism was instilled with centripetal forces of control, 'new cooperativism' is driven by centrifugal forces 'out of control'.

I argue that all the subjects encountered on the field fully respect these principles[35], recuperating a strong ethico-political moral of cooperativism and pushing it further ahead. Still, autogestión is motion and not an achievement, and as such constantly subject to mutations. What has happened to the ancient 'faithful' co-ops could likewise take place within the movement or in the singular subjects of autogestión. In fact, this is already taking place, as noted for the cases of autogestión co-opted by the state in Argentina (Dinerstein 2010; Sitrin 2012; Upchurch, Daguerre, and Ozarow

[35] Conversely, these principles can be considered exclusion criteria in the selection of the subjects. Eventually, some experiences I opted to take out the analysis were discarded precisely for their behaviour closer to the one of 'ordinary' cooperatives than to principles of new cooperativism.

2014)[36]. The only proposed cure is awareness to increase resistance. It is worth travelling through the Greek and Argentinian histories of cooperativism and the relations of these actors with the state to analyse their dynamics and perhaps alert the 'new cooperatives' of the risks always lying ahead of them.

The Ancient Roots of New Cooperativism in Greece

Argentinian's and Greek's 'new cooperatives' share a similar background of old cooperativism, yet they belong to different and distant labour traditions worth addressing separately to understand how we arrive at similar, yet not identical, expressions of autogestión in two distant cultural environments.

In this sections I will dig into the history of the Greek cooperativist tradition to question whether at one point it bore a resemblance to today's experiences of autogestión. I will also touch upon the recent sinister times of Greek cooperativism. The 80s' tight state embracement and parties' invasion onto cooperativism are the reasons behind the sudden fall in popular backing for this workers' organisational form. The argument here presented is that praxes of self-management, performed under the legal definition of cooperatives, could revitalise cooperativism by re-introducing egalitarian, horizontal and democratic forms that Greek co-ops once seemed to know so well.

Greece is historically and culturally part of the European tradition of cooperativism, deriving from the ground-breaking Britannic experiences. Signs of proto-cooperative forms of organising labour

[36] Throughout the manuscript I use the term 'co-opted' to briefly explain this process. Yet, we should rather reflect, as hinted by Dinerstein (2015), on the 'state translation' of these experiments, meaning how much they were circumscribed and narrated with the words of power and within "parameters of legibility" (Vázquez 2011, p.36) negating their alterity and hiding their nature as concrete utopias. Without doubt this happened and happens all the time, both in Argentina and Greece. Aside 'state translation' there is a risk of popular reiteration of power narratives, especially within the institutional Left. What are these experiences capable of doing if they stay *outside* power structures? What can they achieve if they do not dialogue with governments, if they exist in the shadow? These are regular questions being asked when the story of workers' self-management is presented as an *autonomous* concrete utopia. Their hope is seen as a fantasy, their strategy is considered completely inefficient for the purpose, for nor the capitalistic, nor the colonialist, and not even the hetero-communist are capable of understanding what overtakes their political language. The researchers easily fall under the same logic, since "this *untranslatable* excess is invisible to the eyes of social sciences" (Dinerstein, 2015, p.53).

can be found in the 'community system' of the ethnic group of the Romioi during the Ottoman rule of the former Byzantine Empire (1453-1821) (Nasioulas, 2012). This group of merchants was "self-organised in autonomous ways, and excelled in conserving, expanding and revitalising international commerce networks, both for subsistence and market economy" (*Ibid.*, p.145). While operating under the rule of the Ottoman, their relative freedom of organisation brought precursory forms of cooperativism.

During the 18th century cooperativism took proper root in Greece, making the country's cooperativist tradition among the oldest in Europe (Nasioulas, 2012). Linguistically, the Greek terms firstly utilised to address these experiences was the ancient '*koinon'*, meaning common, joint, reciprocal or political (*ibid.*, p. 146). The fertile ground for ancient Greek cooperativism was agriculture. In 1770 the 'Common Company of Ampelakia', composed of 22 villages in Central Greece committed to yarn production, formed several small-sized cooperatives. This common scheme included around 6.000 individuals and 24 factories, and the aim was to avoid unnecessary rivalries and promote '*syntrofies'* (friendship) (*ibid.*). With its General Assembly as decision-making body, its Free University, and having opened 17 branch-stores around Europe, the Ampelakia cooperative is widely considered among the first large modern cooperatives.

When the contemporary workers in self-management think about a network of commons that could sustain and reinforce them, they intend their quantitative presence must be enhanced. Ampelakia shows that, even in ancient times, this was feasible. Not by chance, new cooperatives of Greece tend to recuperate the imaginary and the attitude of this long-lost tradition of village-centred production, educational endeavours, and communal cooperative effort sustaining it. Moreover, the central element they recuperate is the essence of *cooperation*, exemplified by the concept of *syntrofies*. They are careful to avoid competition between themselves (as stated by the members of Syn Allois), but they also believe *internal* cooperation is key, which brings to the suppression of hierarchical roles and the rotation of duties.

Two peculiarities of old cooperativism in Greece still stand today, namely the predominance of women's cooperatives – among which the aggregations of farmers in Thessaly in the 18th century – and the importance of island-based co-ops for commerce between the thousands of these small-sized Mediterranean economies. The maritime co-ops flourished during the Ottoman Rule, contesting private property and favouring a common scheme "for producing ships and conducting

commerce throughout the Mediterranean Sea and even farther as far as Latin America. Out of the total, only a small percentage of vessels were private property" (*Ibid*., p. 147). A unique example of autonomy and cooperativism, particularly centred around women, and mixed with a deeper form of societal engagement with self-organisation, partially survived to this day in the island of Ikaria, in the Aegean Sea. The French politician and explorer Étienne Cabet wrote "Voyage en Icarie" in 1840, impressed by the egalitarian and pacifist form of communism he found there, together with what he described as an application of the theories of Robert Owen he himself admired (Severi 2004). The Frenchman even tried to reproduce this utopian societal organisation by promoting the political movement of the 'Ikarians' and settling several communities in the US, despite the critiques of Marx and Engels.

The island of Ikaria was visited during preliminary fieldwork in 2016, and local cooperatives members met there informally to have a glimpse of the local organisational culture. Ikaria still presents the characteristics of a partially independent community with a significant political and geographical distance from Athens. Workers in autogestión of Greece tend to consider Ikaria as both a contemporary alternative to the status quo and a historical experience of some relevance. In this sense, they recuperate the autonomous spirit of the island and extend it beyond its narrow borders.

The first signs of institutionalisations of the Greek cooperative movement could be seen in 1914, with the law 602 (Nasioulas, 2012). This has been described has an attempt to reconcile State control over production policy (Lambos 1999, p.36). 1914 also signposts the 'loss of innocence' for Greek cooperativism, since together with the legal recognition came a turn of profound institutional interventions in the field. Over the years, the establishment of the Agricultural Bank of Greece, the abolition of the joint liability of cooperative partners to safeguard the banking system's interests and, ultimately, the reduction of agricultural co-ops to mere tools of State policies are examples of the institutional burden onto these once independent actors.

"The Greek State moved to a tight embrace [...] [and] as international market forces kept pressing domestic production, state intervention deepened; extremely centralised state organisations on agricultural production management were established; the role of cooperatives was restrained in marginal and secondary activities" (Nasioulas, 2012, p. 148). This hard patronage would, as expected, not loosen up during the dictatorship regime of Ioannis Metaxas (1936-1941). The

Second World War severely impacted on Greek agricultural production, which gradually recovered only after the fascist occupation.

Amidst the war, from 1941 to 1946, the EAM (the National Liberation Front, the main Greek partisan organisation) launched a campaign to promote social work among the resisting population. With the helping hand of the partisans, forms of self-organisation and self-managed co-ops emerged and contributed to the creation of schools, health centres, infrastructures, and partnerships (Petropoulou 2013). The autonomy of such experiences, which often settled irrespective of the institutional rules and regulations, is frequently remembered with pride and showing a sense of belongingness by today's workers in self-management.

When interviewing local actors, the decade of the 1980s recurrently enters the discourse as the worst era for Greek cooperativism. Following the restoration of democracy in 1974, the populist-socialist governments of PASOK launched major reforms of the sectors through several legislative actions. Among these, politically-driven party lists and voting through representatives were introduced for the co-ops, causing what Nasioulas (2012) calls "devastating effects for the cooperative movement [...]: cooperatives began to be extremely politicised, through the expansion of the patronage and clientele system into their operations, many non-viable investments were made, a negative interlink of the State into cooperative issues was imposed and the total overdue debt of cooperatives towards the Agricultural Bank led to the eventual demise of the agricultural cooperative system in Greece" (p.149).

Alongside the unjustifiable intrusions, the suspensions of the Agricultural Bank's supervision over cooperative activities proves how much these actors had become puppets for political usage. Co-ops did not abide by any need for adequate economic performance nor was any sign left of moral attachment to cooperative principles which could be spotted. While the strongest prospered, the weaker ones were often trapped in their dependence on financial loans, and hundreds were driven into forced bankruptcy throughout the decade (Petropoulou 2013).

Today, the Greek civil society still associates the concept of 'cooperative' to this insalubrious system of political patronage, often arguing that nothing has changed. Nasioulas (2012) observes that "to this day, no serious overturn of this negative image has been witnessed" (pp.149-150). "Political parties have occupied cooperative activity in order to control and disseminate political

power at national, regional, local and sectorial level" (Lambos 1999, pp.73-74). This toxic manipulation that made the Greek cooperative system profoundly inefficient and politically manoeuvrable is harshly criticised by the workers' co-ops in autogestión. Not only do they highlight the distance between their experience and contemporary Greek cooperativism, but often refer to the need to protect themselves from the invasion of the 'controlled ones'.

> No, of course we are something different. With PASOK involved, the money taken, the control … I think that, even if today the young Greek do not believe in co-ops, they decided to join and work together under these very difficult circumstances. Where there is mutual respect, things can move on. We've seen a lot of co-ops that failed because they lacked so, and there was a lot of fighting. We've seen it all, you know. We are not part of *that*. (Niovi, Lacandona).

The implementation of law 4019/2011 amidst the economic crises partially inverted the direction, by introducing the concept of Social Economy in Greece (Nasioulas 2016). While debated in many forums (for instance, this was central in the debate at the Panhellenic Meeting of Karditsa), this law allowed for the recognition of new cooperative actors. For workers in self-management, this meant it was possible to have a legal form to work with. Furthermore, the law identifies "priority of individuals and labour over capital" and a "democratic system of decision-making", together with "autonomy in the management of their activities" as criteria these co-ops must abide by. The main critiques tackle the unexplained definition of 'social economy' that legally puts under one roof social enterprises, SMEs, and self-managed workers' collectives.

> We gathered and started talking about this [whether to adopt the new legal definition of co-op]. And in the beginning we were not very happy about it, because [having] a legal form goes together with other things, like taxes, and goes more in the way of the system … so, in a way, if you use it as a tool, it is just a tool that you can use in the ways you want, even to damage the system that you're in. […] We wrote down a Manifesto, collecting all the ideas and then the practical aspects, such as decision making, how to do when new members join, all these things. So, we wrote 10 pages and we sent it to the Department that needs to approve it if you want to become a social co-op. And they sent it back to us and they said: "what the fuck is this? What did you write here? [laughs]. They say: "we don't care about these things!". And explained we just needed a few points to get it approved. So, we did that, got approved, but kept our Manifesto as internal rules. It's not something legal, but it's what we value, because it's something for the community. (Worker of Apo Kinou).

The turn of 2011 impacted on Greek cooperativism by multiplying the number of these actors, with a law that now included social economy. As Merli (2017) warns, we must be careful when

juxtaposing self-management and cooperativism, in Greece as in Argentina. While their relation might be presented as very linear, cooperativism has been progressively institutionalised and has incorporated market logic, widely used to "hide organisational structures that are not different from normal enterprises, employing wage labour" (p.3).

While the law 4019/2011 has opened the doors to self-management, it must be highlighted that only few among the beneficiaries are in fact operating in conditions of autogestión, and the remaining majority still belongs to the tradition of modern - and 'controlled' - cooperativism. Nevertheless, as argued above, self-management entering this legal universe might represent an occasion to reopen the discussion on the principles of cooperativism, potentially to identify epistemic differences existing between two distant categories of actors sharing the same legal space (Ruggeri, Andrés 2014a).

Still today, the classification of 'co-operative' for the Greek actors of self-management is predominantly utilised as a lukewarmly accepted legal definition. Other preferred self-definitions have no juridical value but a significant ethical one, referring more directly to the common identity of the group. Sinergatikà enhirìmata (σινεργατικά εγχειρήματα) is often used as self-definition to remark the difference with Sineteristikà enhirìmata (συνεταιριστικά εγχειρήματα). The former could be translated into "workers' collective", and according to the activist and scholar Theodoros Karyotis it encompasses the group of workers developing their activities under similar conditions of work, equality, and horizontal decision-making process. The latter, on the contrary, falls closer to a definition of an enterprise. As noted by Merli (2017) who reports the discussion held during the II Euromediterranean Meeting, both prefixes "sin" can be translated as "co-", or "together". Still, while "εργατικά" derives from "work", "εταιριστικά" is closer to "enterprise". The proposed non-literal translation would then be "workers-run cooperatives" versus "cooperative enterprises". The problem extends from the mere linguistic sphere onto the deeper understanding we have of self-management and cooperatives today, in Greece and beyond.

Greek workers-run cooperatives, including Lacandona and others which are not cooperatives as such but undoubtedly belong to the same 'moral' grouping, have an inherent preference for practices and principles of 'old cooperativism', with an open disdain for its contemporary form. *Kafeneion* such as Pagkaki and Perivolaki explicitly adopted the ancient form of social cafeterias as a wilful rediscovery of what is perceived as a long-lost egalitarian tradition of the Greek civil society

(Fotinopoulos 2009; Kantartzis 2013). Similarly, they argue to have been inspired by organisational forms the partisans fighting against the Military Junta (1967-1974) were implementing during those harsh times, not dissimilar to grassroots, horizontal and egalitarian small-scaled cooperatives. In line with this, those co-ops embracing forms of self-management in Greece today insist on the radical necessity to recuperate this moral and practical autonomy, the one their ancient predecessors seemed to incarnate. Moreover, the important presence of women in the cooperative sector in the past is considered worth recuperating.

An Argentinian History of Violence, Renaissance and Resistance

> You cannot fully understand [today's] autogestión without knowing what happened to the labour movement during the years of the military dictatorship (Andrés Ruggeri, my translation)

The modern history of Greece presses on the shoulders of workers' organisations and cooperatives with the burden of civil wars and unfriendly or puppeteering governments. Likewise, the recent history of Argentina is filled with political instability, years of military dictatorships and workers repression followed by neoliberal reforms and financial crises.

Aiming to comprehend the importance of recent history shaping both desires and fears of contemporary participants in autogestión, we should briefly touch upon some major events of the last forty years. The military dictatorship lasting from 1976 to 1983 left profound scars in the bodies and in the minds of the Argentinians, decimating the working class, silencing the resistance and instilling a sense of fear in society. A whole generational layer vanished with night-time abductions, tortures, and the 'death flights' during which sedated prisoners were thrown at high altitude above the waters of Rio de la Plata, just outside Buenos Aires. The 'strategy of terror' included widespread sequestrations and repugnant interrogatory techniques descending upon many citizens accused of activism, among them young couples and pregnant women, making them disappear while kidnapping their new-borns (Petras 1979; Feitlowitz 2011). Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo (The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo), questioning the military for their disappeared sons, daughters and nephews they never met, began to group and protest in the square facing the Casa Rosada, the office of the President. Among unbearable difficulties, menaces and abductions, but with outstanding popular support, the movement grew, survived until today and keeps asking for justice

for the thousands of *desaparecidos*[37]. Aside from the civil repression, the military government launched US-backed economic reforms aiming at privatising the industry, crippling the workers movement and dismantling the unions. Furthermore, the military set the ground for a political economy based on the preponderance of financial capital, on external indebtedness, and transformed the state in an opaque distributor of investment opportunities to national and transnational corporations (Fridman 2010).

This violent transformation of Argentinian society, and the weak resistance that was left alive, opened the way for the aggressive neoliberal reforms that followed and completed what the militaries started. Despite the democratic transition of 1983, resulting from the military debacle during the Falkland-Malvinas war, the government of Alfonsín was unable to cope with skyrocketing debt, hyperinflation and a productive sector close to bankruptcy. These were the conditions that led to the triumph of Carlos Menem in 1989. The decade of the 90s was characterised by privatisations, rising unemployment, poverty and informal jobs. Under the minister Domingo Cavallo the equivalence between the Argentinian peso and the US Dollar was fixed, settling the milestones for the crisis of 2001 (Levey, Ozarow, and Wylde 2014). During these years a movement of unemployed regained the scene: the *Piqueteros* blocked the streets of Argentina with the purpose of calling attention or demanding rights. The *Piqueteros* were able to mobilise around half a million people, and their strategies and actions resonated among the struggling workers.

> The *Piqueteros* are a social movement of unemployed workers, while on the other side there were workers trying not to lose their job. [...] By 1998 around 100-120 businesses were recovered, but at the same time about 5.000 SMEs shut down. The solidarity between the workers within the factory and those outside protesting was astonishing. (Ruggeri, VI Encuentro, my translation).

December 2001 marked a turning point for Argentina, for its economy and its society. It is often believed that Workers' Recuperated Companies show up at this stage, during the times of a terrible political crisis that saw five presidents resigning in few weeks and a widespread popular uproar. Instead, in 2001 a pre-existent proto movement of recuperation became massive, and its strategies solidified. The uniqueness of Argentinian resistance to contemporary neoliberalism and austerity

[37] It is believed that 30,000 people have perished after the sequestrations by the militaries (O'Keeffe 2009).

can be found here, given that no other country experienced such a violent yet creative and liberating process of workers' occupation and resistance, with more than 100 companies involved almost simultaneously.

The crisis was followed by at least two years of profound instability, after which Argentina regained some equilibrium with the government of Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) that openly challenged the IMF, capably inverted the economic trend and, by and large, built its success upon a neo-Peronist left-wing agenda. His wife Cristina Fernández de Kirchner succeeded him at the Casa Rosada ruling until 2015. With the *Kirchnerismo* progressively losing ground to the Global Financial Crisis and due to personal attacks on Cristina's leadership, Mauricio Macri, a wholeheartedly neoliberal public figure, took the power in 2015. The reforms launched by Macri's government aimed at reconquering the trust of both foreign investors and the IMF, but damaged local businesses including WRCs (with impressive rises in taxations known as *tarifazo*) and seem to have brought the country's back to the brink of a financial crisis (Ozarow 2016).

Today, WRCs are having a hard time facing the reforms of Macri, yet many of them can count upon more than 15 years of experience in a constant struggle for survival. Despite the sudden blooming of 2001[38], WRCs are deeply entangled with the historical tactics of Argentinian workers resistance of the last century. First, the term *Empresa Recuperada*, here translated into Workers' Recuperated Company, does not derive from an academic or journalistic interpretation of the phenomenon. It was invented by the workers themselves, who began to call their experiences *Empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores*, or companies recuperated *by its own workers*. The accent on who recuperates what is fundamental, given that owners themselves could 'recover' a factory or workers could put the establishment back on its feet and find a new capitalist investor.

Instead, the solution to a privately-generated crisis – with the bankruptcy of the business and the owners that got off the boat – was in these cases a collective occupation, recuperation and return

[38] According to the last report of the *Relevamiento de Empresas Recuperadas en la Argentina*, published by the Program of Open University of the UBA, 15% of the recuperations took place before 2001, 61% in the midst of the crisis, meaning between 2001 and 2004, 11% between 2005 and 2007, while the last 11% was recovered after 2007, when the Global Financial Crisis hit (Programa Facultad Abierta 2018).

to the production made by the workers themselves and kept in their hands from then on[39]. Rather than being a definitive outcome, the recuperation signals just the beginning of a process. What WRCs introduced, and the main feature that distinguishes them, is the self-management of the workers in economic unity, without capitals nor bosses, developing their organisation in horizontality.

The process of autogestión stands at the core of WRCs and its practices are the driver behind and beyond recuperations. Nevertheless, this derives from techniques developed by the Argentinian workers over a century, comprising factory occupations, strikes, pickets and other joint actions (Fishwick 2019). The nature of these was often collective, as the assembly arose as a pivoting element for the struggle. The occupation of the factory, even when not leading to recuperations, also became a common tactic during the strikes of the 60s and the 70s (2009; 2014).

In those decades, the Argentinian workers movement's capacity to organise, mobilise and obtain results peaked. The leadership of Perón, even considering all its contradictions, was built upon the growing force of the working class, strengthened by the simultaneous global movements of rebellion. The military dictatorship of the late 70s swept away most of the potential of that generation, with a "genocidial attitude" (Ruggeri, VI Encuentro, my translation) towards workers and young dissidents.

> Few times we are told this side of the story, but truth is that many among the *desaparecidos* were workers, if not the majority. Most of them were militants in political or armed organisations. Others were unionists, and within the unions there were collaborators with the dictatorship. These latter were not among those who disappeared. There was also a proven complicity between corporations and the military. High-ranked managers of Ford, Mercedes Benz, Ledesma and many others passed to the military lists of people [their employees] who had to be sequestered and then vanished. All of this left the Argentinian labour movement – when the democracy returned in the 80s – in a debilitating state with which it was impossible to obtain the level of organisation and mobilisation reached before. And this result was also perceptible during the weak resistance we had in the 90s, feebler that we could have expected. (Ruggeri, VI Encuentro, my translation).

In the 90s, with the neoliberal regime of Menem, 'democratic' aggressions against the labour movements were carried on, accompanied by privatisations and flexibilization (Fishwick and

[39] Magnani (2009) noted that "In large business magazines like The Economist, [these experiences] are ominously described as a threat to the sacred principle of private property" (p.184).

Selwyn 2016). The nature of the global markets had mutated as well: before then dictatorship, the Argentinian workers had experienced the Fordist-Taylorist model and the welfare state, living in a situation of (almost) full employment and counting on the availability of jobs if losing theirs. In the 90s all of this either deeply transformed or disappeared, not just in the Latin American country. Many jobs were now perceived as transient or ephemeral. "When the workers noticed this was happening, there were already millions in the streets" (Ruggeri, VI Encuentro, my translation). Hence, occupying and recuperating their businesses became the last opportunity to defend their jobs, the last resort for the economic viability of their lives.

Not surprisingly, occupations and attempts of recuperations have been invariably supressed and annihilated by institutional forces. In the 70s, in Argentina as well as in Chile, with US-backed dictatorships and the forced implementation of the recipes of the Chicago School, attempts of factory occupations were bloodily and systematically repressed (Fishwick and Selwyn 2016). Nevertheless, 2001 came after a decade of growing social conflict, due to the skyrocketing unemployment, the economic disintegration of the country, and inflamed by the ability of the *Piqueteros* to mobilise once again society. The situation was so unprecedented that the traditional state capacity of repressing was suddenly missing. A window opened for the workers to occupy and recuperate, given that – for a very short moment – there was no police, no judicial cause, no opposition nor violence against them. This lasted only until 2002, when a disarticulated state regained its capacity to inhibit, yet largely incapable of dealing with the multiplicity of massive social conflicts erupted by then.

Any process of recuperation after then invariably became a hard struggle, often violent, against evictions and legal attempts to dismantle or damage the workers' organisation and productive capacity. Yet, the parenthesis of 2001 allowed for a consolidation of a 'road to recuperation' (Ruggeri, Andrés 2014a). From the occupation, to the legal formation of a workers' cooperative, the path to follow became clearer and, more importantly, repeatable. Itzigsohn and Rebón (2015) observed that the recuperations taking place after 2001, although seemingly spontaneous, were driven by activists, unionists, social movements and NGOs granting their survival until the present time. The impulse for the formation of the first contemporary WRCs came, for instance, from unaligned unions. The Graphic and Metallurgical Union of Quilmes was among the first to open the

way. Another peculiar feature to bear in mind has to do with the workers themselves: those deciding to occupy were often the last remaining, after many others had been fired before. Bent up to their limits of resistance, they found no other option than dismantling the private property of their company. The option was not sought unless under heavy pressure, and the workers choosing it had to confront themselves under high amounts of private tension. "Sometimes, it's hard to find words to convey the anxiety, the doubts, the injustices and the hunger facing the worker who wants to reclaim a job" (Magnani 2009, p. 238). The effort could not have been possible if not common, supported by their peers in solidarity, and under the unprecedented socio-economic conditions described above.

And when they finally decided to occupy, they knowingly embarked in an exhausting, yet hopefully liberatory, journey. As anticipated, the first need was to become subjects legally recognised by the State and the market, and to do so in order to produce and maintain their activity alive. The legal form of the *cooperativa de trabajo* – workers' cooperative – became the most accessible and apt for the processes of recuperation and *autogestión*. Still, in the majority of cases of factory recuperation, the input to embrace the cooperative form came from outside (Itzigsohn and Rebón 2015, p.186).

> It is a kind of legal form that allows workers to express autogestión, where all of them are members, and all the members are workers. The legislation does not say much else, therefore it is possible to use that framework for a self-managed company, allowing them to operate legally in the market. For the WRCs the goal was to recuperate the clients, the suppliers, their network. They were asked "who are you?", and with this form they could say "we are the cooperative X". (Ruggeri, VI Encuentro, my translation).

> On the 15th of August 2002 we had the assembly that established the cooperative. We did it following the regulations of INAES[40]. We had to fight so much to become recognised, every part of it was a struggle, because [in the offices] there were *peronistas* y *menemistas* that didn't want us to … they were like "what is up with you guys, now? Every one of you wants to start a cooperative!" (Silvia, La Cacerola, my translation)

The legal fight to keep autogestión alive within their establishment needs a side explanation, although given the density of the argument it could only be summed up in brief here. The

40 Instituto Nacional de Asociativismo y Economía Social – National Institution of Associations and Social Economy

Argentinian workers deciding to occupy and recuperate registered their collective as a workers' cooperative to operate legally, to have access to the expropriation law, and thus to become temporary owners of their establishments. Given the debts their business has accumulated under private control, they must face a bankruptcy process. The workers have thus two objectives: to stop the bankruptcy and prevent the sale of the factory to the best bidder; and then to complete the process of expropriation. Under the current legislation they can put the bankruptcy in stand-by, while the expropriation must be validated by the legislative power. Usually, the latter endorses the expropriation but passes the matter to the executive power, leaving the decision in their hands. The government, in this situation, should cover the private debts and allow for the expropriation, and rarely does either of the two, even more rarely now with Macri. The workers are thus left with a 5-years right to use the business due to the legislative validation, but cannot have full control of their establishment. In this situation, it is hard if not impossible for them to have access to financing, leaving them in an embargo-kind of condition (Cole 2006; Carretero Miramar 2010; Vieta 2012).

Establishing a workers' cooperative is nonetheless the necessary step to make autogestión visible and become able to practice it while still under the institutional and market precepts (Atzeni and Ghigliani 2007). This is precisely the step where autogestión meets cooperativism, and while the latter is surely also used as a 'legal box' to fulfil other wishes, it must be highlighted how no other box can contain autogestión better for Argentinians. From these premises, the thesis here proposed is that autogestión is in fact rediscovering, rewiring and giving new life to cooperativism. Francisco Martinez of Textiles Pigüé explained how he does not even remember the seven principles of cooperativism implying that, with autogestión, the principles are inherently embraced, possibly even surpassed and reinvented.

> The world of co-ops is so heterogeneous, so many forms of organising everyone's activity. In our case, since we are a WRC, in the beginning it was a matter of necessity. The form we chose to take [the cooperative] was to legitimise the occupation. But throughout the years of this experience, it transformed into a rational choice for many of us … we understood the process, the deeper meaning … I can say now, it is a life choice. (Lenor, Textiles Pigüé, my translation).

> We were in contact with IMPA, and their experience of being a WRCs and a cooperative with a sense of cooperativism closer to ours. The workers' cooperative framework allowed to develop forms of autogestión, and if you had no legal capacity you couldn't do business,

> you could not do anything. So, it was the legal form we needed. After, we found out that the cooperative law provides a fairly decent democratic and participative framework. [...] But then we decided rules and regulations for ourselves. Like a straitjacket that we forced ourselves to wear! And now, with my experience, I can say that our regulations are much more democratic than the law itself. (Silvia, La Cacerola, my translation).

Cooperativism was imported to Argentina with the arrival of European migrants who developed their working activities in associational forms since the 19th century. Magnani (2009) observed that in 1875, the cooperative movement, based on the seven Rochdale principles, had been replicated in Montevideo, in the neighbouring Uruguay. From the year 1900 co-ops began to multiply without a legal background, and the denomination 'cooperative' began to be used by both Rochdale-like experiences as well as by others that only barely resembled to a cooperative. In 1926 the first jurisdictional framework for cooperatives, the law 11.388 set the prerequisites (Montes and Ressel 2003).

The history of Argentinian cooperativism encounters the first experiences of factory recuperation in the 50s, as recalled by Ruggeri.

> For instance, one of the oldest *recuperada* [WRC] that we have is from 1957. It is a graphic industry named COGTAL. Once, this factory was printing the newspapers of *Peronismo*. And when the military organised the coup that brought to the dictatorship, they prohibited both the Peronist periodicals and any kind of related literature. The workers became unemployed, and with a long process of struggle and negotiation they converted the establishment into a cooperative, that kept printing other stuff ... but under the form of a workers' cooperative. (Ruggeri, VI Encuentro, my translation).

The 1976-83 dictatorship was aware of the phenomenon and modified the law in order to abolish the instruments granting a cooperative financing, causing the bankruptcy and the disappearing of thousands of popular co-ops (Ruggeri, Andrés 2014a, p. 39). Not surprisingly, the cooperative trend began to slowly grow again in the decade of the 80s (Acosta, Levin, and Verbeke 2013).

Carlos Menem reignited the crisis in the 90s by granting huge corporations much higher benefits when operating in the local markets. The only ones that prospered in the following decades were 'harmless' businesses, contributing to make 'cooperativism' drift away from the moral grounds from where it started. In 2008, 12.760 co-ops were legally registered in Argentina, yet only 5.100 of them displayed a clear and identifiable economic activity. 87.9% of them had cooperative members who did not work for them but were beneficiaries of their services (Ruggeri, Andrés 2014a, p. 39). In short, only 1 out of 10 cooperative members can be associated with workers of the WRCs or

similar. In 2012, under the governmental plan "Argentina Trabaja", about 100.000 cooperative employments were created, yet these workers get a fixed salary from the state and have nothing to do with cooperativism or autogestión. Lastly, large and medium corporations have forced their employees to give up their long-term contracts and became associates in fake cooperatives to become re-contracted under worse conditions (*Ibid*., p.40).

Despite the Argentinian cooperative movement being one of the oldest in the continent, its origin in the socialist and anarchist labour movement (and in the Friendly Societies) is a long-lost memory (*Ibid.*, p. 38). Modern cooperatives, as much as in Greece or elsewhere, are a constellation of 'genuine' co-ops mixed with consortiums that exploit the legal form to employ salaried workers, implementing hierarchical structures and behaving like a regular capitalist business under any aspect.

Cooperativism and autogestión can be associable ideas in the history of labour struggles, nonetheless Argentinian workers in the WRCs always preferred referring to themselves as 'workers', rather than 'cooperative members' or 'self-managed workers'. The reasons can be sought in the inherent 'grey' connotation of cooperativism for Argentinians today. The several distortions that accumulated throughout the years over the definition of 'cooperative' made the levels of mistrust peak among the Argentinians, and the sentiment is shared within the whole Latin American continent. For instance, in Brazil, those employers exploiting the workers with the misuse of cooperative instruments and legal frameworks are nicknamed *coopergatos*, or thief-cooperativists (*Ibid.*, p.42).

> Any cooperative – and on this the Argentinian cooperativism imitates the one of many parts of the world – would follow the same path: you have those that, in the end, collapse because they cannot bear the weight of capitalist competition, and the system crushes them (as it crushes the people). And then you have the successful co-ops, that regrettably become organisations with capitalist criteria, begin to outsource their jobs, and end up being something far away from what a cooperative should be. (Silvia, La Cacerola, my translation)

Yet, it can be argued that the main feature of 'ethical' cooperativism is that it should allow for "maintain alternative norms of producing under capitalist economic constraints while providing an ongoing critique of the traditional modes of workplace organization" (Ranis 2016, p.45). The workers in self-management aim at reinvading cooperativism with their 'ethical' tradition of labour

resistance. In doing so, they actively recuperate the original precepts of cooperativism and incorporate them into their contemporary experiences.

Beyond each one's peculiarity, the road of Argentinian autogestión is characterised by three features, all of which rotating around the concept of autonomy. Firstly, as explained in the beginning of the section, historical and cultural circumstances made autogestión possible in Argentina, making the country 'paving the way' for other workers across the world. This singularity has been shaped recuperating pieces from the pre-dictatorship labour era, as well as from non-workplace experiences of autonomy such as the one of the *piqueteros* (as we will see more clearly in the following section). Secondly, the turning point of 2001 opened the door of creativity and a social 'renaissance' amidst the debris of neoliberalism. Autogestión is a fruit of that unprecedented time. On one side, when advocating for a recuperation and re-moralisation of cooperativism, we point at *that* autogestión. Yet, on the other, almost two decades have passed and Argentinian autogestión has mutated many times and its shape might now appear different from its original one. Thirdly, the relation with authorities and the unequal perceptions on the importance on autonomy are the factors that caused the mutations. State co-optations or, more simply, the passing time made some pivotal experiences of recuperation and self-management become different actors than they were at the start. Less conflictual, but also less independent and less energetic.

The dispute on the horizon of autogestión seems to rotate around a crucial, unstable element: autonomy. Thinking, acting and behaving independently was the immediate necessity of those neighbourhood assemblies and workers' cooperatives born out of December 2001. Likewise, autonomy seems extremely important in the eyes of many Greek new cooperatives' workers, today. The time scale arguably plays a role, since autogestión is younger in Greece compared to its almost twenty years of full-bodied existence in Argentina. Yet, this cannot fully explain the dynamics of autonomy. The argument, instead, is that autonomy is a culturally, historically, locally recuperated feature of autogestión. As such, it cannot be equal from one place to another, and from one time to the other. If we want to look where this form of autonomy originated, we must necessarily trace it back to Argentina, perhaps to the *Piqueteros.* If we aim to understand where autonomy is best preserved and is capable of prefiguring what will be next, we should look at Greece, today. My claim is that autonomy is the vital characteristic of autogestión, and to

understand where autogestión comes from and where it is going, we should identify where and when autonomy was and is more vibrant.

In the Key of Autonomy

> [...] 4. Autonomy and Independence: cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their cooperative autonomy (From the 7 Cooperative Principles, Birchall 1994, p.14).

Greek and Argentinian labour movement histories are constellated by moments of rupture with the state and crisscrossed by autonomous tension that made workers abandon the institutional framework to attempt self-organised resistance.

To mention just a few, in Greece we had the isolated 'concrete utopia' of Ikaria and the partisans' co-ops during the civil war in Greece, whose legacy still resonates today. Similarly, the conscience of the Argentinian working class has been moulded by the anarcho-syndacalist influences of the 20s and 30s. Nevertheless, Greece and Argentina are two countries whose political environment was often characterised by high degrees of State centralisation, strong political personalities, significant levels of institutional interventions and, amidst the working class, deep and rooted communist desires for a 'dictatorship of the proletariat'.

Bearing in mind this co-existence of centripetal and centrifugal forces, and before considering the unpredictable variable introduced by recent social movements (Occupy, etc.), we should seek amidst the form of workers' rebellions those capable of prefiguring autonomy. Dinerstein (2014) suggests that *Piqueteros* might have, in fact, anticipated the 'autonomous ethics' of the labour struggles to come. Challenging the belief that *Piqueteros*' goal was uniquely to obtain concessions and jobs availability from the state, she argues that the broad movement of the unemployed workers organisations (UWOs) "signalled a turning point in the history of labour resistance in Argentina – a country with a powerful (mainly Peronist) state-sponsored trade union movement – and raised several questions about working class identity, the labour movement, the relation between labour and the social, and labour and the state" (*Ibid.,* p.1039). The *Piqueteros* filled a (partial) void that had been left by the annihilating forces of militaries and neoliberal politics within

the working class. Yet, instead of replicating pre-existent approaches, they took a pioneering 'third way': in, against and beyond the State (Böhm, Dinerstein, and Spicer 2010).

Alongside an intellectual and operational autonomy, the UWOs radicalised the mobilisations from the grassroots by introducing social justice and solidarity, forging new relations with the community. Gibson-Graham (2006) labelled forms like theirs of social and moral economy with the term 'community economy'. Hence, what stands out here is the emergence of a new duality, the one between autonomy and community, where one reinforces the other. The UWOs "maintain[ed] high levels of grassroots mobilisation and organisation, and … implement[ed] autonomous endeavours that have influenced both local communities and the politics of the country" (Dinerstein 2014, p.1045). If 'autonomy' meant wanting to be autonomous *from* the State, the latter did not fail to reply soon enough. While the *Piqueteros* and the unemployed movements were "fashioning emancipatory horizons" (*Ibid.*, p.1050), the state responded with violent repression (mainly in the 90s) followed by (successful) attempts to co-opt and ultimately de-politicise the movement (from the 2000s).

Dinerstein (*Ibid.*) brilliantly summarises the *raison d'être* of their counterpart, namely the capitalist state: "[it is] not an 'institution' or […] a tool to act collectively, but the political form of capitalist social relations, a mediation that shapes social relations, including the filtering and moulding of the struggles of the working class and the unemployed via politics, policy and the law. The existence of the capitalist state ensures that the society of the free and equal remains a chimera" (*Ibid.,* p.1051). The financial and technical support offered to the movement by the state from 2003, under the presidency of Néstor Kirchner, was not neutral. Rather, it came at the cost of the 'NGO-ization' of the UWOs, which were now required to register as organisations, facing the scrutiny of government inspectors. It has been argued that this technique of depoliticization has been used against WRCs some ten years later (Upchurch, Daguerre, and Ozarow 2014).

Despite this return, what stands out from the experience of the UWOs in Argentina was their radicality in actions and thoughts, that provoked a rethinking of labour struggle strategies, insisting on the feature of autonomy. The radicality of the *Piqueteros'* collective action does not rest on their demands to the state but in the artful way that they navigated the tensions arising from the processing of these demands with, against, despite and beyond the state ((Böhm, Dinerstein, and Spicer 2010).Their influence on the strategies and tactics – but predominantly on the *mindsets* – of

the WRCs movement about to erupt in 2001 has been described by many interlocutors as massive. "It was on the *piquete* that the assembly experience deepened and relationships amongst neighbours, supporting one another often for days at a time, created the solidarity and forms of self-organization that were to be the base of the movements in the future" (Sitrin 2016, p.142).

> "¡Piquete y cacerola, la lucha es una sola!" [Pickets and pots, the struggle is but one] The picket was the symbol or the rural, while for us the pot was the symbol of the urban. From this we got the name "*La Cacerola"*. Let's talk a bit more about our history. What we have in common with WRCs is that we all come from that gigantic movement, that energy, that mobilisation, all that … even the ideas. This began in the 90s with the movement of the *Piqueteros*, but people had already begun to recuperate factories. In 2001 we made a huge step, because business failures began to multiply, and there was an exponential growth in the recuperations. This was an important transition […] and even if we do directly 'derive' from the movement of the *Piqueteros* – because we come from the popular assemblies – they initiated all this in the countryside. The popular assemblies that later emerged in the cities were, not by chance, autonomous and very much participative. (Silvia, La Cacerola, my translation)

The 'new cooperatives' that surged together and beyond the practices of recuperation in Argentina inherited the experience of the pickets, thus embodying that autonomous tension characterising the transformed labour struggle. Less than ten years later, the Greek workers experimenting with autogestión did not fail to absorb and replicate the lesson of autonomy coming from this Latin American history.

On the other hand, many authors (Dinerstein 2008; Sitrin 2012) noticed that the experience of Argentinian WRCs has been slowly hindered by progressive institutional interferences, in a pattern that resembles the one above described adopted with the *Piqueteros*, beginning with recognition, followed by subsidies, ending with control. Greek self-management came after a decade, and thus its workers had the time to observe the trajectory of Argentinian's one. Fearing this eventuality, the Greek workers seem more careful when reasoning about their relations with the state and the European Union. Autonomy, for most of them, must be defended by any means necessary.

> Also, [we learned] all the problems and all the mistakes they [the Argentinian WRCs] made. They made big mistakes, Ruggeri talks about that, so the point is not to repeat them. Mainly the mistake they made was at the level of … [he asks for help to translate] … trusting the state. So, we try not to trust the state nor to *use* the state. And it's very difficult. The word in Greek is is αφομοίωση [assimilation], and it happens when you are considered to be an alternative. As alternative, you must have limits. You are not allowed to radicalise too much! But if you want to avoid assimilation, you have to. (Worker of Halikouti)

A major theoretical influence for Greek workers can be found in the theories of Castoriadis (1981; 1992), particularly in reference to his stance against authority. His influence resonates in the words of the interviewees when they repeatedly state how they will protect the autonomy of their self-management "at all possible levels", knowing they live in a "hostile environment" amid the forces that do not let them express themselves fully'[41].

While this radical positioning towards the state seems to have permeated the surface and lingered inside the Greek autogestión, the same is not (or no longer) entirely valid for Argentinians. The 'friendly' government of Néstor Kirchner that ruled from 2003 to 2007 was seen by some as an opportunity to have an institutional back-up, legitimise their experience, and ultimately strengthen the self-managed business. For instance, the relationship between Textiles Pigüé and the institutions has mutated over the years depending on the politicians that ruled at the time, but their ties with Néstor are undeniable. Compared to them, the Trotskyist approach of FaSinPat Zanón made them become pariahs and relegated in a distant spot from the main political arena. The complexity of the scenario, the ever-evolving relationships, together with the significant changes in the political arena, cannot fully sustain a linear interpretation of the Argentinian autogestión having been institutionally co-opted, hence destined to a progressive depoliticization. Nonetheless, I argue that, for its novelty, its radicalism, and its attempts 'not to repeat the same mistakes', the Greek forms of autogestión appear – nowadays – capable of carrying more robust antibodies of autonomism if compared to their contemporary Argentinian peers. In some cases, they re-appropriated capital-driven and state-controlled activities, not aiming to relieve the state from its responsibilities, but rather to transform them into commons, hence keeping them autonomous from interferences.

> We must fight for everyone to have access to public health care. At the same time, we do not want to negotiate the price of health any longer. Therefore, if on one side we fight for public health, on the other we began to take health in our hands, considering it a non-negotiable common good (Dimitra, Vio Me Clinic)

What Dimitra expresses is a conflictual stance against the state, but at the same time Vio Me Clinic does not want to become a substitute to a lacking welfare, which is disappearing under the attacks

[41] I extracted these concepts and thoughts from the dialogue with Michalis of Heraklion Cooperative, yet his ideas were shared and expressed in similar forms by workers of Apo Kinou, Tzepeto and Halikouti.

of austerity. This argument touches upon a delicate issue: these workers walk on a thin line between *demanding* rights and *constructing* them by themselves. Rather than succumbing to the contradiction, my argument is that they find a coherent way out of it keeping their autonomy as the unnegotiable factor. The state does not disappear in the picture, but it is invariably addressed as an actor that cannot be allowed to enter their premises, both physically and intangibly. At the same time, the state *can* be pressured to obtain concessions. I will later expand on this coherent positioning describing it as a form of embryonal communalism, where their 'conflictual mutualism'[42] is fully expressed binarily towards the state and the community.

Recapitulating, I claim that these new cooperatives are recuperating the abilities of their predecessors, both from the workers' and non-workers traditions. There is an ongoing recuperation of original ethical cooperativists features, and of lost abilities of emancipation within the workplace (Vieta 2018). Beyond these, their fundamental recuperated feature that characterises the radical form of autogestión they enact is autonomy. Yet, this was not a constant variable throughout the last twenty years of self-management. Instead, it took stronger or more softer forms depending on the context and on the relation with the political arena. While right-wing governments tended to repress autonomy no matter what, left-wing rulers ended up trying to make it fade via co-optation and de-politicisation. The *fil rouge* where the most robust forms of autonomy is carried connects pre-WRC bloom era of *Piqueteros* in Argentina to some of the contemporary new co-ops in Greece.

Autonomy appears as an unstable element, that requires constant renewal and frequently succumbs to the passing time allied with repressive forces. Yet, these subjects prove their autonomous path is walkable. New cooperatives are hence teaching cooperativism a straightforward lesson: autonomy must regain the central stage if cooperativism wants to recover its anti-hegemonic positioning. With this I mean that cooperativism must consider and absorb the concept of active/partisan autonomy. Hence, autonomy must be recuperated, but also prefigured to create something different from the original 'neutral' autonomy of Robert Owen. Equipped with partisan autonomy, new cooperatives recuperate "its historical roots in the social anarchist-

[42] https://www.fuorimercato.com/pratiche/223-bozza-di-manifesto-per-i-diritti-del-mutualismo.html

influenced stream of self-determination and its suggestive potential for another world" (Vieta 2014, p.798)

The usual Marxist critique is that their conflictual stance versus the state authority is necessarily disruptive. On the contrary, these subjects seem to challenge the perspective of De Peuter and Witheford (2010) when they argue that "it seems undeniable [...] that the creation, maintenance, and proliferation of worker co-ops today depend on the existence of state support of some kind" (p.41). Yet, conversely, they recall that "socialist models have subordinates these [cooperative] values to state authority" (*Ibid.*). Paradoxically, they conclude by saying that "growth and interconnection of the commons have to precede [...] state interventions, to prefiguratively establish the necessary preconditions" (*Ibid.,* p.47). I claim that the there is no need for state intervention to steer the commoning practices of these new cooperatives, and that they can prosper – or creatively resist – in a networked autonomy, thanks to reverberations and communalism. By this I mean their survival as alterities depends on their capacity of reinforcing conflictual mutualism and interconnections with their 'ethical peers', while creating a 'coming and going' relationship with their communities.

Hence, autonomy is a vital element for autogestión and a precondition for commoning. It is fragile, and hardly stays for long, for the power comes back to oppress it and put the workers naked back into the stream of state control and capitalism. Autonomy travels, though, as it transferred from the *Piqueteros* to the Greek workers in self-management. The vector it uses to travel can be described as a reverberation, a sound wave carrying the pragmatic lessons of autogestión in time and space. Reverberations allowed the reproduction of autogestión from Argentina to Greece, and the recreation of autonomy, horizontalism and creative resistance from social movement to workplaces.

Remaking of Recuperated Fragments in the Present

Before moving on, we should reconsider what these workers recuperated along their different journeys. From the original theorisations of cooperativism they seemed to have rediscovered the communal and participatory elements, while challenging the Marxist interpretations that saw them

just as 'their own capitalists'. From the praxes of ancient cooperativism – initiated by the Rochdale experience – they got the uncompromising attitude, the attention to horizontal relations and mutualism.

Greek workers in self-management found amidst the cracks of their history the seminal although marginal experience of partisans' cooperatives during the civil war and intend to keep it as a main ethical reference for their contemporary journey. Furthermore, they rediscovered the symbolic and cultural role of the *kafeneion*, a centre for political life in the villages – almost a separate and independent local decisional body – that is well-known in the Hellenic country as much as it has been obliterated by globalisation. Lastly, they recuperated pieces and fragments of the Argentinian experience of the WRCs. The latter was, in turn, shaped by its workers' rediscovery of a side-lined and often forgotten history of anarcho-syndicalism and autonomism in the Latin American country. Moreover, the Argentinian workers found in their recent history the leitmotif for their resistance, specifically from the tactics of the *Piqueteros*. In both countries the workers had to deal with a turbulent history of state repression and counter-insurgences, constellated by ethical and less-so experiences of cooperativism. In the present time, they integrated within their organisations the most radical features of their historical antecedents, while considering the cooperativist treasure yet demarcating their distance with its new crooked incarnations.

Both Argentinians and Greeks added prefiguration on top of recuperation. For the Argentinians, the experience of the *Piqueteros* was seminal but had the crucial limitation of taking place outside the factory, once their jobs had been lost. They opted to integrate the strategies learned on the picket line *within* the factory. The Greek workers learned a great deal from the preceding experience of their Argentinian peers, yet they could observe their decade-long trajectory, which led some of them on a path where autonomy gradually vanished or was damaged. Hence, while recuperating their organisational skills, they opted to follow a hard line and put autonomy as the uncompromisable factor.

6. Reverberations

The more we dig into their dynamics, the more Vieta's (2014b) 'stream of self-determination and autogestión' becomes noticeable, as a magnetic force, a sound wave interconnecting different and distant actors, from Latin America to Europe. All of them are experimenting with a political form of self-management. All of them are recuperating pieces from the past and reinterpreting them, possibly in the key of autonomy. Yet, none of them is a lonely trailblazer that ended up following the same trajectory by chance. On the contrary, WRCs and new co-ops in Argentina inherited from the treasure of the social movements that preceded them. Likewise, the workers in autogestión in Greece have a moral debt towards the Square Movement of 2011. At one point, Argentinian and Greek histories of anti-hegemonic social movements and alternative workplace reorganisations interconnected. To top it all, both scenarios seem to have been largely influenced by previous social movements, despite their distance and difference.

Connecting all the dots we reach the point where, somehow, a Cretan cafeteria experimenting with autogestión in 2017 ends up replicating and re-elaborating concepts and praxes originally sketched by a group of landless workers in rural Brazil some fifty years before. I call these 'reverberations', or the ways in which prefiguration propagates through time, space, and people. Reverberations are both means and ends, representing on one side the long-lasting outcome of popular movements and, on the other, the potential to reinterpret and reproduce themselves in other and new forms, with which they leave their energy unchanged.

This chapter will begin by delineating what I mean when using this concept. Then, we can begin a backward journey to trace where the major influences for the contemporary movement of autogestión came from, how they interconnected with each other, what kind of legacy they left. These reverberations carry a message constituted by the core elements of autogestión, yet without constant reinterpretation (hence prefiguration) these concepts are at risk of losing their emancipatory potential. The message seems to travel from social movements to workplaces, from one workplace to another, and lastly it can come back to the society that originated it. I will analyse in depth these three kinds of reverberations before drawing conclusions on their dissimilarities,

opening the discourse on what kind of impact they generate onto the community intertwining with the workplaces in autogestión.

What Are Reverberations?

> *"A number of years have passed since the plaza occupations, yet the reverberations continue"*
>
> *Sitrin 2016, p.139*

In a recently published article on a French periodical[43] the philosopher Alan Badiou writes about the Yellow Vest movement in France. He reiterates the same old argument that *these kinds* of popular movements (citing Occupy, Gezi Park, etc.) fail in having an impact and leaving a trace on society, and thus their ideologies and strategies should be questioned, since they do not appear able to achieve anything apart from instants of turmoil fading before too long. Here I will argue that 'reverberations' are precisely what Badiou and other scholars are incapable of distinguishing. Reverberations can be described as a two-faced element. On one side, they are a living legacy seeping into society, whose chemistry allows them to replicate themselves and continue their prefigurative journey even after the social movement has left the streets. The workers' organisations included in this analysis survived the social movement that generated or considerably influenced them. These workers (and their communities) carry on, within their offices and meetings, that journey of prefiguration that the precedent movements personified for a brief, yet cracking, moment. On the other side, reverberations can be simply understood as propagations of emancipatory praxis-driven ideas in time and space. From Argentina to Greece, comparable organisational concepts and political desires resonated from one movement to another. One generation that experienced a sudden crack and a shortly lived outburst might as well identify with their successors able to cultivate praxes and approaches that many judged to have vanished. It is self-evident that our past can have a deep influence on the replication of power structures and organisations that we will experience in the future. Yet, it is less obvious when we ponder on how some marginal and scattered experience of self-organisation questioning power *itself* have been

[43] https://www.lautrequotidien.fr/articles/2019/3/13/alain-badiou-leons-du-mouvement-des-gilets-jaunes-

spotted, understood, digested and eventually replicated in very distant contexts and environments over the last three decades. While power replicates itself easily through history, anti-powers are regularly blocked, buried and – apparently – forgotten. For power to constantly rejuvenate a complex machinery is functioning night and day (George 1999), contributing to making power structures leak into every level of our epistemology, reproducing and disseminating the Foucaultian 'micropowers' (Jessop 2007). For anti-powers, their means are necessarily limited and frequently smashed. Yet, we will see how bottom-up, leaderless, faceless and potentially unknown ideas propagate(d) from the rural lands of Chiapas to the streets of Athens, without losing their magnitude nor their innovative potential, but rather amplified and renewed, keeping on travelling in the path of prefiguration. The ones propagating them are the very actors experimenting with these ideas, not counting activists, sympathisers, scholars and alternative media stung by them. Reverberations survive the clamps of power because they flow under the sightless eyes of mainstream inspectors *and* many allegedly unaligned analysers, as the example of Badiou demonstrates.

When commenting on horizontal social movements, Žižek[44] unsurprisingly wrote that "[t]heir fatal limitation resides precisely in their much-praised "leaderless" character, their chaotic self-organization". Here we argue that the fatal limitation of Žižek resides precisely in underestimating and devaluing the reverberations of power denial and self-organisation these movements were capable of absorbing and nourish, leaving them resonating for the next movement that will come, and for their society to preserve. Perhaps we should rather thank Žižek for allowing reverberations to keep flowing almost unspotted and uncontrolled. The recurrent mantra is that these movements are inefficient because they are not structured, not leadered, and since they present "unclear requests" in what they want from power. Far from not being crossed by multiple contradictions, contemporary anti-power movements working around the idea of self-organisation seem to be more recurrent and might well prove that the centre of the social change is passing from the governmental arena to the communal one.

[44]https://subliminalsensibility.wordpress.com/2018/12/22/slavoj-zizek-how-mao-would-have-evaluated-the-yellow-vests/

"La sociedad civil se transformaba en una nueva fuente de certezas en ese tiempo de incertidumbres" (Di Paolo 2011, p.28)[45]

"In such rare moments "ordinary" citizens join activist, union, and student protests en masse. By creating a critical mass, their participation makes [...] systemic transformation possible" (Onuch 2014, p.90)

On 25 May 2011 the plaza facing the Greek parliament, Syntagma Square, was invaded by an unprecedented wave of demonstrations. Rather than its magnitude, the quality of the protest was something Greece had never witnessed before. The mass had been mustered by the activists of Direct Democracy Now! (Άμεση Δημοκρατία Τώρα!), convocated through the Facebook page "Indignants at Syntagma" (Αγανακτισμένοι Στο Σύνταγμα) and had no institutional affiliation of any kind, not with parties nor with unions. On that day, a similar group gathered under the White Tower in Thessaloniki as well as in other major Greek centres. The participants later referred to this phenomenon as the Square Movement, and such a definition echoes the non-politically partisan, encompassing nature of the group, as if there was no guiding force behind or beyond it, but rather a straightforward 'we' in action (Holloway 2014). This bottom-up mobilisation defied the logic of austerity and rejected the institutional precepts, exemplifying "the crisis of the existing capital relation" (Nasioka 2014, p. 285). Among their anti-representativeness slogans, it was possible to spot a notable "404 Error: Democracy Not Found"[46].

The Square Movement acted as an antibody against the neoliberal crisis and the austerity measures that began to compress Greek civil society from 2008. Citizens and activists together saw the crisis as an opportunity, a rupture that was possible to infiltrate and expand through refusal, anger, organisation and prefiguration. Autonomy and direct democracy projected a political horizon that acknowledged the end of pre-crisis class relations and abandoned the demands for wage or labour

45 "The civil society was transforming itself in a new spring of certainties in a time of uncertainties"

46 https://memeburn.com/2015/03/error-404-democracy-not-found-what-social-media-tells-us-about-the-state-of-our-culture/

for their unattainability (Nasioka 2014). The goal was rather to overturn the crisis and regenerate the civil society with self-organisation and self-management, taking their lives in their own hands.

> To the lack of money, we are responding with solidarity exchange without money and gratuitous bazaars. To the lack of food, we are responding with self-cultivation, self-managed gardens and conservation of traditional seeds. To unemployment we are responding with labour collectives and cooperatives, to the lack of social housing we are responding with social occupations of housing and eco-communities, whereas to the lack of camaraderie we are responding with collective kitchens. To the deficit in democracy we are responding with direct-democratic neighbourhood assemblies and tak[ing] matters in our hands … our utopias [are] the reality of tomorrow (Iliosporoi: Sunflowers, 2010 on Petropoulou 2013, p. 73).

These people had broken with the traditional forms of protests which envisage an escalation of intensity aiming at steering or replacing institutional powers, opting instead for an "open, ongoing assembly in front of the parliament building in Syntagma Square, literally turning their backs on the building and facing one another" (Sitrin and Azzellini 2014). Athenian citizens grew the conscience to 'turn their backs' and face one another predominantly from the anarchist-influenced neighbourhood organisations, whose epicentre was – and still is – located in Exarcheia, only two metro stops away from Syntagma.

The neighbourhood is considered a 'safe space' from the police and a gathering point for militants, with a high density of cafés and small parks that give a space for popular meet-ups and informal organisations (Arampatzi 2017). The streets of Exarcheia had already erupted several times before the events of May 2011, notably in 2008 and, before then, on December 2006, after the killing of a fifteen-year-old by the police. In the spot were Alexandros Grigoropoulos was murdered there is a memorial wall with a painting donated by the Zapatista community of Chiapas, and an inscription of solidarity by Subcomandante Marcos (Sitrin and Azzellini 2014).

The rebellions in the lands of Chiapas, Mexico, and the Square Occupations in Athens are separated by almost two decades and ten thousand kilometres. From an activist point of view, the statement of solidarity seems self-explanatory. From an investigational point of view, it is worth travelling through those years and kilometres again, aiming to understand how organisational ideas from a repressed minority in Mexico merged with socialist-libertarian traditions, invigorating attempts of direct democracy, ultimately mobilising several scattered societies that embraced *horizontalidad*, autonomy, self-management in the dawn of the new millennium.

While the Square Movement epicentre was Athens, analogous expressions of austerity refusal and joyful self-reconstruction (bergman and Montgomery 2017) took place almost simultaneously in Zuccotti Park, New York, and Puerta del Sol, Madrid. Graber recalls the fascinating dynamics leading to self-organisation and direct democracy during Occupy Wall Street (OWS) in his book "The Democracy Project" (2013). "All these movements shared a broad method, that is, the occupation of a public space and then the development of horizontal methods of government of that space [...] [and] direct action" (De Angelis 2017, p.43). However, it is impossible to circumscribe the width of this 'movement of movements' (Della Porta and Mosca 2005) given that similar eruptions were seen in Tahrir Square, Cairo, in Gezi Park, Istanbul, in Portugal, Brazil, Hong Kong and so forth, at least from 2010 onwards.

Their minimum common denominators were the participants – regularly a 'we' rather than a structured group or class; the leitmotif – that Sitrin and Azzellini summarised with "They can't represent us!" (2014); their means – occupations of public spaces and formations of assemblies; the territorialisation of politics and horizontalization of relations; and lastly what has been described as a re-territorialisation (Sitrin 2006), since their intention was invariably to expand from the square to society, reoccupying and questioning the logics of power and subordination in the neighbourhoods and in the workplaces. Invariably, they have been repressed by state forces, devalued by neoliberal actors, ignored or teased by the media, and directly attacked by fascist groups. As noted by a Greek activist, fascists aim is to "restore some sense of certainty" (Sitrin and Azzellini 2014, p.79) and it could be observed how this constraining 'old and secure' attitude vis-à-vis the prefigurative potential these movements embody is in fact the major philosophical tension tearing apart our modern societies.

All the techniques and strategies implemented by these societies in movement had been slowly digested, incorporated, reinterpreted and practically mastered over at least a decade. Their predecessors were in fact labelled 'the first wave' (Sitrin and Azzellini 2014), referring to the upsurge of social movements happening between the 90s and the 2000s[47]. One among them stands out for its magnitude and for its prefigurative capacity to anticipate the shape of the struggle

[47] Including the broader and more encompassing 'alter-globalisation movement' or 'no global' as labelled after the manifestations in Seattle, 1999.

to come. This movement behaved in such a way to make the concept of *horizontalidad* accessible and acceptable for a major capital city, eventually reverberating onto the whole country.

It all began in those famous nights of December 19 and 20, 2001, in Buenos Aires. The eruption came after ten years of neoliberal policies, of structural adjustments, culminated with the *corralito*[48]. The sudden moment of rupture in which Argentinians took the power back into their hands is symbolised by the *cacerolazo*, the pots and pans protest, and by the chant "*¡Que se vayan todos!*" – Away with them all. (Svampa 2008). In the testimony I collected from Silvia:

> On December 19 everything was up in the air, they [the government] had left people without access to their savings, and so it began with mobilizations … and they had no clever idea than declaring on the TV the state of siege and forbidding meet-ups of more than 3 people! We were in the middle of a meeting in the edifice of a mutual society that had gone bankrupt [the *Banco Mayo*]. […] And suddenly we began to hear a loud noise from the balconies nearby … *pom pom* … "did you hear that?" "yes, yes". […] We got out of the building and there were people saying, "let's go to the corner" so we followed them to Rivadavia y Castro Barros [a street corner along one of the main boulevards of Buenos Aires]. Once we got there, we saw lots of people coming out from their houses and banging pots. And suddenly we started marching, more people joined us. It was a completely spontaneous reaction. No one had summoned us. It was shocking, a popular explosion … and we kept walking, people kept joining, and when we reached Plaza de Mayo it had become *un quilombo*[49]. That night we had some incidents, but it got worse the day after. On the 20th young people from the *conurbano* came to the city, all the unemployed joined. It was chaotic, only in Buenos Aires 15 people got killed, and more than 20 in the rest of the country. But there I was, in the middle of them, admiring the courage of those guys that had no fear facing the police. They killed 15 of them, and yet they could not weaken their resistance. When the politicians realised this, when the businessmen realised this … well, he [De La Rua] jumped in the famous helicopter. (Silvia, La Cacerola, my translation)

President De La Rua flew away from the roof of the *Casa Rosada* that very night, leaving the country 'by itself'. It is worth noticing that the anecdote of Silvia contains at least three distinctive elements: the sudden crack in the social fabric; the unmediated mobilisation; and the abrupt loss of

[48] The measure of Minister of Economy Domingo Cavallo that froze bank accounts and forbade withdrawals of U.S. dollars. It was taken amidst huge protests and in response to the heavy indebtment generated by a long stagnation mainly due to the fixed exchange rate between Argentinian Peso and US Dollar (Cantamutto and Ozarow 2016).

[49] The word comes from the *Lunfardo* urban vocabulary of Buenos Aires. Anciently meaning 'brothel', it then evolved into a regularly used word in contemporary speeches (see https://transpanish.biz/translation_blog/the-meaning-of-quilombo/). 'A bloody mess' can perhaps be a translation capable of returning its original gist for the context.

institutional control and conciliatory power over society, all at once. When hearing these reconstructions, the perception is that the civil society felt overwhelmingly terrified and astonishingly free at the same time. Despite the chaos that reigned, society found an unexpected opening for its own self-management in the crack of the country's worst economic and political crisis.

Writing about those times, Zibechi (2012) noted that "In the daily life of divided societies, public time dominates the scene; the only audible voices are those of the economic, political and union elites. For this reason the Argentine insurrection was both "unexpected" and "spontaneous" to those elites, who could not hear the underground sounds, despite the fact that for more than a decade the voices had been echoing from below anticipating the approaching event" (p.76).

As observed before, the autonomous stance deeply influencing this uprising had roots in the anticipatory slant of the *Piqueteros*. The main novelty introduced by the Argentinian movement of 2001 was fit for its urban context and coherent as a means: the neighbourhood assembly. The *vecino* (neighbour) became the new social actor mutually recognisable, while the horizontal interactions produced a form of political praxis *beyond* the State (Dinerstein 2014), built upon the open dialogue and capable of questioning the laws that govern society (Castoriadis 1997).

This democratic reinvention acting from and upon the territory – accompanied with the disaffection for representativeness and verticality – was not entirely new in the environment, and it had also been influenced by precedent experiences, such as the *Piqueteros*, the Zapatistas or the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) of Brazil. The most surprising event during the 'years of possibilities' 2002 and 2003 in Argentina was that such a marginal organisational form took root among the *vecinos* of a major city, whose multiplied and broadened its application (Levey, Ozarow, and Wylde 2014).

Significantly, the assembly had a chance to catch on in the Argentinian context for the event of a major socio-economic crisis. In the words of Goddard (2006, p.271) "[t]he crisis in Argentina was also a moment of magical absence". The opportunity given by a catastrophic event for markets and institutions should not be underestimated, and while each of these neoliberal calamities (Argentina 2001, Greece 2008-11) ravaged civil society, at the same time they left blank spaces for the

emergence of the yet-to-come. de Sousa Santos clearly identified the need to magnify the emergent, to raise up the rebel subjectivities moulded in the eye of the storm (2007).

The Argentinian *asambleas vecinales* might in fact reverse Klein's 'shock therapy' (2007), demonstrating that autonomous organisational opportunities might see the light of the day because of the crises. Or that, if crises are used by power forces to pull the straps further, the event could as well unleash elements capable of trimming these straps and move without restrictions.

The argument here sustained can be summarised in short as follows. The crisis is a trigger, opening possibilities for: governments to operate with a non-ordinary intensity of repression and/or launching unpopular political measures (i.e. austerity plans) as argued by Klein; as well as for anti-institutional elements to gain strength, expand their popular basin and political action. Among the latter we find a stronger polarisation (if compared to the pre-crisis period) between those emancipatory movements aiming at recuperating communitarian forms of democracy vis à vis fascist-like entities exploiting the unbalances of the crisis for reinforcing their propaganda of repression, division, control and centralisation of power. The best example can be Greece in the aftermath of 2011, where an allegedly anti-neoliberal party (Syriza) ended up implementing the harshest austerity measures; while social movements aiming at expanding the cracks in capitalism and destabilising capitalist relations had to confront both the government *and* fascist formations on the rise, i.e. Golden Dawn (Nasioka 2014). The Global Financial Crisis in Europe unleashed similar energies and radicalised contrapositions in Italy, France, Germany, UK to say the least. Crisis is hence an opportunity that these workers were capable of exploiting to breed autonomies, even if 'out of necessity'.

The radical reputation of Argentinian's assemblies had such a high resonating influence that the movements which followed could not help trying to replicate this Southern experience of aggregation, mutualism, and participatory democracy. As remarked by Sitrin and Azzellini (2014, p.21) "[a]s of May 2012, there were forty-five neighbourhood assemblies in Athens, each focusing on the needs of its population [...] coordinated citywide [...] through the weekly "assembly of assemblies" in which all neighbourhoods participate".

The roots of Argentinian popular assemblies stretch to multiple subterranean points in Latin America political history (Oaxaca, Venezuela, etc.), yet it is worth focussing on the more direct

linkages they have with prior, but not distant, moments in which another society found itself on the verge of systemic transformation. The movement known as Zapatistas materialised on January 1st, 1994, in the northern half of Chiapas State, Mexico. Drained after over 500 years of domination, they declared '*Ya Basta*' (enough!) and moved from this initial negation to the affirmation of a horizontal democratic model where there was no space left for State or market impositions over them (Esteva 1999; Anguiano 2005; Gulewitsch 2011). The Zapatistas took back their lands and constituted communities, giving life to several autonomous projects in the region, such as "schools, health clinics, cooperative land projects and the women's group" (Sitrin 2016, p.139).

Nail (2013) claims that Zapatistas would become a major inspiration for the popular movements that followed due to their 'global resistance', meaning that their thought was moulded by their context but not constrained by its specificities. The wave generated by the uprising in Chiapas would reverberate carrying the potential of an intimate – and thus replicable – revolution. It must be noted, in fact, that "[t]he Zapatistas, as many of the autonomous movements in Latin America, speak of the importance of dignity and changed subjectivity" (Sitrin 2016, p.140). This intimate overturn opened the way to introduce horizontalism as a learning process ('walking, we ask questions') and consensus decision-making (Nail 2013).

The practice of the *encuentro* was perhaps even more fundamental for the dissemination and reapplication of their thought. "An *encuentro* is not a meeting, a panel or a conference, it is a way of sharing developed by the Zapatistas as another form of doing politics: from below and to the left. It is a place where we can all speak, we will all listen, and we can all learn. It is a place where we can share the many different struggles that make us one" (MJB 2009 on Maeckelbergh 2014, p. 354, my italic).

Another innovation consolidated by the Zapatistas and exported by the anti-globalist movements in the decades of the 90s and 2000s was the praxis of direct action. This notion has been first de-territorialised and then re-contextualised, and it was summed to local interpretations, as in the case of *Piquetero*'s direct action for Argentina, or for the Greek anarchists. "The use of direct action comes first from a lack of response from the government in each location, or worse, their complicity in the exploitation of the land. Rather than petition a government, which movements see as fruitless, they take matters into their own hands" (Sitrin 2016, p. 143)

Perhaps the peculiarity of the Zapatistas and the MST is that they were both so forgotten and repressed by their own governments that it seemed impossible to open a fruitful discussion with national powers. The point of view here exposed is that, again, autonomy is deeply contextual, but is also very much practical and comes from an initial need, as much as occupations, recuperations and self-organisation. Zapatistas organised autonomously because *they had no other option*, hence they had to learn how to do everything by themselves. The legacy they left for the social movements that came after was thus deeply imbued into autonomy, yet Occupy, M-15 or even the Square Movement could have attempted to petition the government, to steer the authorities, to influence the parties with probably better chances than a tiny, isolated and State-severed community in South Mexico. Rather than doing so, large Argentinian, European and US born social movements saw the autonomous approach as the very key to their own success, willingly taking a longer and steeper route below and above the institutions. This proves how distinctly the thought of autonomy, direct action and horizontalism has been heard and understood by the masses. The tools of Zapatismo have been reapplied in contextually and culturally distant places for their emancipatory potential, for their prefigurative capacity, or perhaps simply because they embody our contemporary anti-hegemonic zeitgeist.

Autonomy for the Zapatistas included an unprecedented and hardly replicable independence in the fields of production, distribution and consumption. Particularly, Zapatista coffee has become known worldwide among the Fair Trade or Alternative Trade consumers. It comes as no surprise that Greek workers' cooperatives of commerce put this product on their shelves as a statement of political alignment and solidarity (Chatzidakis 2013). Zapatismo keeps sending powerful reverberations to distant movements worldwide, and despite the passing time, its emancipatory message is still considered among the strongest in our days. Not by chance, it directly transmits an image of long-lasting resistance in the heart of a repressive capitalist state[50]. Furthermore, Zapatismo clearly influenced Greek and Argentinian experiences for what concerns the imagined configuration of a fair decision-making process. Whenever workers in self-management whine for

[50] And despite several attempts by mainstream media to describe their experience as close to its end, the EZLN recently announced the creation of six new rebel municipalities (*caracoles*) in August 2019, they keep growing and "breaking the fence" (see http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2019/08/17/comunicado-del-ccri-cg-del-ezln-y-rompimos-el-cerco-subcomandante-insurgente-moises/).

the length and complexity of their assemblies, they seem to find energy to keep this practice alive only by recalling the Zapatista experience. In doing so, they assign utmost value to the assembly indicating this was *the element* that kept Zapatistas on their moral ground for so long.

The origins of the organisational praxes and political approaches seen in the European squares in 2011 are undoubtedly manifold. The Zapatistas headed the way but were also capable of capturing and magnifying a ground-breaking and anticipatory vision of another less known Southern movement, namely the MST. Their revolutionary thought was conceived upon and for the land, far away from the shattering urbanisation of the Brazilian coast. Agriculture, the land and its inhabitant are the 'poorest among the poor' of this century, having been exploited and forgotten by a post-colonial appropriation of rural resources, particularly in the South. Peasant-led struggles have a long tradition in Latin America, dating back to the first political revolts of the 1930s, until today's joint campaigns uniting land workers and indigenous communities (Petras, James and Veltmeyer 2007).

Responding to the expropriations with an epistemological refusal of private property, evicted peasants and their rural families began to occupy unregistered lands in the Rio Grande Do Sul, Brazil, in the late 1970s (Dinerstein 2014). Occupations multiplied until the movement decided to meet in 1984 and "after five days of debates, discussions, collective reflections, [...] founded the MST" (Stedile 2009). The most striking problem they identified was the land tenure system of Brazil, relegating the country land ownership to an inconceivable Gini-coefficient of 0.9, with large estates dominating over small landholders (Sauer 2006). Zibechi (1998) noted that the movement experimented with different approaches, from the catholic, to the communist and the reformist. Yet, despite the variations, the MST maintained a strict financial independence and autonomy from party politics and religious organisations. Dinerstein (2014) sees as contentious their relationship with the PT – The Labour Party of Brazil, politically aligned with their requests – for the 'unorthodox Marxism' of the MST.

Here we focus on two substantial innovations the MST brought to the international scenario, unaware of how successful they would have become amongst future social movements. Firstly, their aforementioned autonomous stance, apparently incoherent for a movement requesting a land reform. On the contrary, their position reinforced the base, allowed for fruitful connections with urban groups and guaranteed the survival of the MST through decades to come. Secondly,

their territorial, intimate, personal and communal de-capitalisation of everyday praxes. MST's concrete utopia was built upon an 'imagined community' (Wolford 2003) configured in the organisation of their settlements in collective property and grassroots cooperativism, 'venturing beyond' (Dinerstein 2014) the reality of capitalism.

Dinerstein (2015) interprets their practical action of 'cutting the wire' – essential to trespass the private property and occupy the land – as a theoretical negation, a rejection of the capitalistic coding of their own fate, to "initiate a journey into the exciting (unknown) possibility of an alternative life" (p.177). Their extraordinary response to an apparent legislative problem became a wide-ranging prefigurative proposal tackling the nature of power and the origins of inequality for our societies.

We have seen how the above described societies in movement embody prefiguration, and as such think and act with practices that aim to replace the state centralisation and the capital accumulation. They think horizontally and act consequently, they bring about specific goals yet *move* for a complete societal transformation. To measure their success in terms of how many laws they were capable of making the government pass or how much influence they had on the rise or failure of a specific party is simply absurd. Maeckleberg (2016) argues that to ask whether these are successful or not means to deal with the time frame, and usually these movements are considered 'failed' since social scientists are not able to spot the frequencies they leave in the air.

Inheriting from the praxes of the libertarian tradition, the MST prefigured direct action without representation nor leaders – or *leaderful*, as for Maecklebergh (2013) –, as did the *Piqueteros*. Their influence made the horizontality of the *asambleas* possible, and reproducible in the workplace for the WRCs. Autogestión emerged as a synthesis of these trajectories with its prefigurative potential and was then understood and replicated in the Greek workplaces. These latter had been largely influenced by closer prefigurative movements such as the Square Movement and more distant as the revolution in Rojava. All these reverberations have lasting effects in the anti-hegemonic organisations of our societies.

The Message

If we assign to reverberations the dual capacity of being both means and ends, we should then question what do they carry, or what is the message incorporated within their sound texture?

The argument is that their message, made by distant knowledges and always mutating, is tripartite. It is made of the legacy of practices accumulated throughout the years, with the outcomes (positive and negative) these practices had in their context of experimentation. The practices I refer to are necessarily emancipatory and encompassing the organisational, relational and political levels. For instance, the practice of recuperating a factory in a remote Argentinian province might reverberate reaching the workers occupying the establishments of Vio Me, in Northern Greece. Years of emancipatory organisational techniques experimented at FaSinPat are valued, condensed and vehiculated, arriving to the ears of the Greek workers, who have the choice and the opportunity to learn from them. Paraphrasing, the primary pragmatic elements carried by the stream are the (open) principles of autogestión. All the notional and tangible aspects of self-organisation narrated in the previous chapters have reasonable hopes of being absorbed – without making them abstract points -, understood and reapplied in a different context only thanks to reverberations.

The second feature of the message travelling with reverberations is tangible solidarity. Regardless of their context, experience, level of pressure or any other factor, workers performing autogestión persistently state their experience would not be sustainable if deprived of solidarity. This expression of solidarity is impressive if recognising how it ties together workers and groups from such distant and different environments, even travelling through time. Visiting each other, buying their reciprocal products, spreading information about their struggle, helping to solve each other's internal conflicts, or simply meeting and feeling a sense of common belonging are all manifestation of solidarity. All of these generate sense of community, raise the level of commitment and ultimately have a positive impact on each one's reasons to hope. Atzeni called his experience in meeting these workers during the occupations as a "living encounter with solidarity" (2010), while in Spanish the preferred word of the workers would perhaps be *compartir*, to share. The latter expresses more vividly the sense of being, acting and becoming together. It digs more profoundly

than 'solidarity'. As previously noted, this multilevel and rooted form of solidarity is embedded within and comes with autogestión.

The third element reverberations carry is emancipatory language. This language produces the un-learning of capitalist relations as well as the private de-construction of deeply rooted models of thinking and behaviour. Capitalism has "appropriated the human body, turning cells into microfactories, [...] [and conceiving] human nature [...] as a potential or actual commodity" (de Sousa Santos 2007, p.xli). It is this language of autonomy that unbalances our self by questioning the unquestionable: am I *naturally* oriented towards an individualist, even selfish, Darwinist struggle to survive alone in the crisis? Should I *indisputably* follow the path indicated by my boss, the leader, the party, the Union, the state? Am I ready to give up my life-driving goal of making money in favour of a hazardous collective commitment? The weight of certainties one must put at stake before embarking into an open-finale adventure of self-organisation and emancipation is massive. What Motta (2015; 2016) describes as un-learning can happen only under three conditions: a liminal situation of social and private crisis forcing ourselves to unleash the hidden capacity to prefigure beyond the given; a mutual commitment of reciprocal solidarity and support along the difficult journey ahead (here including the tangible solidarity of distant groups that went down that road before); the pragmatic, theoretical and linguistic tools needed to 'trespass the fence'. While the crisis is the known factor in the equation, all the rest comes with reverberations.

A language of emancipation allows diversity to surface, vis à vis the standardisation of culture and practices imposed by global capitalism. This terminology of rupture and liberation rejects the norm, the moral social order, the 'naturality' of the mainstream epistemology. "The exclusion, oppression and discrimination [global capitalism] produces have not only economic, social, and political dimensions but also cultural and epistemological. [...] the epistemological diversity of the world is immense, as immense as its cultural diversity and [...] the recognition of such diversity must be at the core of the global resistance against capitalism and of the formulation of alternative forms of sociability" (de Sousa Santos 2007, p.xix). The need for a recognition of subaltern and suppressed forms of knowledge is at the core of de Sousa Santos' argument. Against the 'monoculture of scientific knowledge' he proposes a 'ecology of knowledges'. The emancipatory language travelling with reverberations contains the seeds for an ecological turn of knowledges, making visible the invisible and valuing the anti-norm. Particularly in the context of workers' resistance against

austerity and capitalism, this language is in constant adjournment to progressively include concepts originally belonging to the marginalised. The most evident case is probably the motto "occupy, resist, produce" which was first coined by the MST in the rural lands of Brazil, then incorporated within the emancipatory language, diffused through reverberations, and now recurrently utilised in the recuperated factories in Europe. "The ecology of knowledges is an invitation to the promotion of non-relativistic dialogues among knowledges, granting "equality of opportunities" to the different kinds of knowledge engaged in ever broader epistemological disputes aimed both at maximizing their respective contributions to build a more democratic and just society and at decolonizing knowledge and power" (de Sousa Santos 2007, p.xx). This is the essence of the emancipatory language in action, and the reason of its replicability and intelligibility in distant cultures and times. Workers in self-management are the result of this language, and only by using it they can navigate the veins of capitalism *while* disturbing its frequencies and creating ruptures.

In line with the 'ecology of knowledges', linguistics of emancipation might even act at another level, bridging the centuries-old gap between the intellectual side of the struggle, and the pragmatic one. As noted by Ruggeri during the II Euromediterranean, autogestión also implies to cease with the division of labour between those who think and those who do. This very work of research has been done in this spirit, since all the main analytical contributions come from the workers themselves, from their theorisations and self-observation of their practices. Poetically, it can be argued that autogestión removes the pedestals under the feet of the intellectuals and raises the volume of the workers' voices. More pragmatically, autogestión implies that workers and scholars can both experiment, theorise and perform politics with their tools. The example of Facultad Abierta is significant, as is the constant collaboration between workers and non-workers during the Meetings proving the feasibility of this horizontal reconfiguration (Peláez and Balaguer 2017). In conclusion, reverberations carry a message of rupture with vertical structures and with their language. If understood and digested, this message provokes a reorganisation at relationship levels, an intimate process of unlearning, and eventually to re-balance the workers with the intellectuals, now both (or better, jointly) entitled to frame the political message overflowing from their practices.

> This is not a place where the workers tell the intellectual what they do, and not even a space where the intellectuals theorise about what the workers do. Here we discuss together, because us intellectuals we are also workers, even if many times we do not recognise

> ourselves as that. Still, we have to accept that identity, by which the intellectual and the militant are also workers. We are workers. We must include ourselves in that class. At the same time, the labour forces are also intellectuals, and for instance one worker of a recuperated company can interpret her experience, she can analyse it, and many times she will do better than a researcher, and it is necessary that she acknowledges that role. Here we do not have a division between those who think and those who do, we must close that gap. (Ruggeri, Il Euromediterranean, my translation).

In our context of study, the boundary a movement-born message must break to become effective is the metaphorical – sometimes physical – factory wall. In this last section we will focus on how the knowledges originated within the square protest can become intelligible and useful for the workers. On the other hand, we should comprehend in what form and under which conditions a workplace-framed knowledge can come back to society without losing its self-replicating emancipatory potential.

Three Kinds of Reverberations

> When you write a prologue to a book of friends, of comrades, of militants, you are wordless, you cannot find letters to put on a page and describe what you felt the first time you went there and saw them. Their task seemed unbearable. A very big factory, with a small group of workers in it, but they had the conviction they could make it. I noticed they were sure they would have made it. Thus, we started talking, supporting them, and that is when I began to feel they were going to make it. […] At the beginning, I remember well, they were earning so little, but everyone would save some money for the medications for the unemployed comrades outside the factory. Everything was built on solidarity and love for the comrades and the work, and to defend their source of labour […]. Today, without any doubt, the workers are so many, and the factory seems so tiny. […] The truth is that the comrades of Pigüé are a living example. […] I am extremely proud that us *Madres* we are the godmothers of your factory and we will keep embracing you as always, comrades. (Hebe de Bonafini, President of the Association *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, prologue to the book "Cooperativa Textiles Pigüé" (2014), my translation).

The above are extracts from a heart-warming statement of tangible solidarity interlacing the struggle of the *Madres* with the workers of the recuperated textile factory in Pigüé. A critical social movement born amidst the cruel times of the dictatorship ascribed the moral objectives of the workers in autogestión as aligned to theirs.

In this section we will deal with three types of reverberations, considering how they link players together. The first kind is the one here exemplified by the relation stretching from Plaza de Mayo occupied by the Mothers to the distant town of Pigüé, where the workers of the textile factory

gained ethical recognition, solidarity and knowledge of resistance thanks to this stream. The societies in movement described above all had a lasting influence on the experiences of workers' recuperation, self-management and, ultimately, increased their ability to prefigurate. The solidarity travelling through reverberations increased their resistance, while the emancipatory language granted them the tools to un-learn and act creatively. Hence, the first kind of reverberations here considered will be 'from movements to the workplace'. Then, direct interrelations between distant workplaces will be discussed and their reverberations analysed. Lastly, I will touch upon the process of community outreach that many workplaces in self-management put in place, a process, I argue, that is a consistent part of the prefigurative feature of autogestión. The reverberations moving from the workplace to reach their 'communities' will hence be described as the third observable kind.

Movement-Workplace

When dialoguing and theorising with the workers about their main influences, the picture that recurrently appears is that of a 'chain of reverberations'. As in the case of Lacandona, their name and ethical principles come from the Zapatista experience, they were inspired by the leading role of Vio Me in Greece, but ultimately, they owe much to the anticipatory action of Syn Allois. Rather than simply being different sources, they can be placed in a chain where each step added some relevant element to breed the experience of Lacandona. Here we break down that chain to focus on what kind of message and capacities arrived from which kind of flow. This exercise's purpose is not to dissect and distribute credits. Rather, it aims to show how the chain would lose its whole resistance if one of the pieces went missing. For instance, the experience of the Zapatistas opened the eyes of Niovi and her colleagues at Lacandona and was amongst the main reasons for them to leave the organisation Fair Trade Hellas and start operating autonomously.

> […] and from the beginning we knew that our main product would be the Zapatista Coffee, for sure. That's why the name of the shop if Lacandona. We give tribute to the jungle of Chiapas.
> Q: Were you inspired by some theories or some authors?
> A: It's not a specific theory that inspired us. It's life and what you learn, what you talk about. And of course, more than from theories, we were inspired by what the Zapatistas were able to do. (Niovi, Lacandona)

Silvia of La Cacerola, in Buenos Aires, did not fail to remark upon how their experience was one of the most direct outcomes of the neighbourhood assemblies. In the Argentinian case, a society in turmoil was first able to gather and invent, and then to leave organisational traces in the social fabric of the city with cooperatives such as La Cacerola and many others. Considering several WRCs, Magnani (2009) noted that "Chilavert was supported by the Assembly of Pompeya, El Aguante by the Assembly of Carapachay, and Nueva Esperanza (formerly Grissinopoli), Crometal, the BAUEN Hotel, and others were supported by several assemblies at once" (p.205). This short, almost immediate, kind of reverberation from the movement to the workplace made some of the assemblies' *ethics* last until today within the many self-managed businesses dotting Buenos Aires.

The graphic Chilavert was born independently but soon enough decided to tie with its neighbourhood assembly, in the area of Pompeya. As they recall, two other 'external' actors from the society played a significant role on funnelling their journey and equipping them with the skills to resist the evictions. The first were, once again, the *Piqueteros*. One of the new members recalls the story from the pre-occupation stage, when the owner had heavy debts towards his employees and kept only a few of them, which witnessed the worsening of the financial situation and stayed despite little guarantees.

> The workers accepted these conditions because in Argentina we had an extremely high unemployment level, and we knew the experience of the *Piqueteros*, that once were working, then became jobless and the only thing they could do was to organise blockades. They blocked the roads because they were already outside the factories, and obviously they couldn't have gone on strike.
> Q (worker of Vio Me): So, what did they get from the *Piqueteros*?
> A: The experience. But also, they acknowledge that if you end up in the street, there is only that much left to do. The workers first accepted these conditions not to be left on the street. […] When they decided to occupy, the first thing they did was to bind with other social organisations, starting with the popular assemblies active here, in Pompeya. Then they received lot of support from the MNER, they helped us. (Current worker of Chilavert talking about the original members, my translation)

The other valuable factor, beside the neighbourhood assembly, was a pivotal federation already described as vital in consolidating and proposing a legal and viable 'route to autogestión' to many WRCs in Argentina, the MNER. Nevertheless, the negative elements of the *Piqueteros* reverberations and the concept above expressed, 'to learn from them, but without becoming like them', is analytically significant. Knowledge travelling through the flows connecting movements and workplaces is praxes-driven, and while the organisational praxes of *Piqueteros* are appreciated

by the workers of Chilavert, their concrete situation of unemployment must be necessarily dodged. Prefiguration can be detected observing these workers' capacity to disentangle the reverberations coming from *Piqueteros*, utilising their *purposeful* organisational techniques yet *without* leaving the factory. Reverberations, deprived of prefiguration, would lack of the creativity required to make them root in divergent scenarios, and would probably be just reiterations destined to long-term failure. The process here described can be summarised in the words of the workers, or "learning from the mistakes", and it is an integral and fundamental part of reverberations.

While some connections between the movements and the workplace are geographically, temporally and socially linear – i.e. from the neighbourhood assembly to La Cacerola -, others are 'chains of reverberations', for instance from the MST's "Occupy, Resist, Produce" to Vio Me factory passing through Argentinian occupations and the first attempts of recuperation. Some others, though, are less predictable, and prove that each experience of autogestión is the result of hundreds of variables. Local and international anti-hegemonic histories, the contextual elements, the effects of the crisis, and the reverberations from their close and distant peers cover just a part of the story. In the case of the Heraklion Coop, in Crete, one major source of unexpected reverberations was a Catalan-bred movement calling for an 'Integral Revolution'.

> It was an international call to all organisations, to all networks around the globe, that for us was interesting to connect each other. We found ourselves very close to those political beliefs and we tried to communicate with them. We got the chance at the Commons Festival that was organised here in Heraklion. Three comrades from the Catalan Integral Cooperative (CIC) visited us here. We had a face to face discussion to decide how to proceed, [...] we got a lot of feedback from them. Still, we were very different, pretty far away, and we had never heard of each other's before ... but we were talking about autonomy, self-sustainability, equality and things like that, and we had this integral vision on how we could address each aspect that society needs: education, health, food, etc. The basic needs of society. And they were talking about the same thing. (Michalis, ICH)

The constellation of sources of reverberations might be vast, but the trend emerging is that eventually most of them would not remain isolated and instead contribute in shaping a web. Across this surface, pragmatic organisational thoughts with a political aim, a palpable form of solidarity and an emancipatory language might travel from a movement and taking root in a workplace.

Workplace-Workplace

Q: Where did you get the inspiration from?
A: Walter [one of the founding members] had some knowledge of Uruguayan cooperatives, him being from Uruguay. On the other hand, IMPA was a self-managed cooperative, and a prominent one. We connected with IMPA and we began to participate in the movement that later was named 'of recuperated factories', of which IMPA was one of the living symbols. From them we learned so much. (Silvia, La Cacerola, my translation)

Our main ideas are inspired by Halikouti. It's the fusion of political principles we had when we started as workers. This idea initially came from Pagkaki, they passed their knowledge to Halikouti. Halikouti was the first cooperative in Rethymno, so we got inspired by them. [...] And we had a talk when our team had a lot of people leaving ... a lot of people left from Tzepeto ... we had to sit down and talk about it: "ok, what are we doing?". And we talked about the inspiration from Halikouti, and inspiration from others, to understand how we wanted to approach this.
(Worker of Tzepeto)

For our first project, Beigyri, we took a lot from the experience of Syn Allois (Worker of Halikouti)
Yes, of course Syn Allois was a big inspiration for us (Niovi, Lacandona)

The above are just few amid many examples of a chain of short-distance but intense reverberations from one workplace in autogestión to another. Travelling through the European continent and Latin America, getting in touch with distant workplaces, it was possible to note the role Hotel BAUEN had for the self-managed businesses of Buenos Aires, the importance IMPA had for FaSinPat, Textiles Pigüé and nearly every recuperated factory of the country. Reconstructing backwards the flow of reverberations made clear how Vio Me was taken as a role model for many Greek workers embarking on the adventure of autogestión, and the prominence of Pagkaki and Syn Allois in showing the way to follow for small self-managed cafeterias and shops across the country.

Nevertheless, the primal question behind this investigation was whether the Argentinian experiences of self-management have had a perceptible impact on the Greek scenario. A positive answer was never taken for granted, and while at this point it might appear quite manifest that robust connections are in place, only a careful consideration of the reverberations from workplace to workplace could provide a clear picture. This section focusing on the second kind of reverberations intends to provide the ground for all the arguments of the thesis to stand upon.

Q: Who were you inspired by for your occupation and recuperation?

> A: From Halyvourgiki[51], for instance. We tried to imitate their perseverance throughout the struggles. From our Argentinian friends of FaSinPat we learned so much, their experience was amazing. We came to the conclusion that even if capital and neoliberal policies are the same everywhere, so is the working class! Furthermore, our Latin American comrades gave us some specific suggestions on how to deal with problems they had to face more than ten years ago. (Worker of Vio Me, interview for WOTS?, translated)

The above is an excerpt from a mail interview conducted in 2015 for an online journal, at the early stages of this research. After having explored the issue throughout the following four years, and having had the opportunity to discuss it with workers of the two continents, the impression is that Vio Me played a significant role of recipient and distributor of the Argentinian's autogestión for Greece[52]. Yet, this interpretation would be simplistic if not considering the several other direct or indirect forms of interactions between the two worlds.

> We are inspired by Argentina, that's for sure. Especially after knowing the experiences of the occupied businesses from Raúl Zibechi or Ruggeri. [He goes to take a book from the shelf]. This is the one, it's pretty exciting when you read this book [showing a Greek version of '*Que Son Las Empresas Recuperadas?*' by Andrés Ruggeri]. It was published here in Greece thanks to a collaboration between two cooperatives, one in Athens and one in Thessaloniki.
> Q: and from this book you even took something practical?
> A: Yes, yes! There was a reaction all over Greece. I'm trying to say that we are influenced from the experiments of Argentina, in many ways. But also, in a mental way, I think we are closer to things like the Zapatistas, or the Kurds, as political suggestions. (Worker of Halikouti)

The significance of Ruggeri's book, listed among their main practical sources of inspiration, must be necessarily considered a turning point in the analysis of Greek autogestión. Coming back to the composition of the 'message' – or the knowledge – travelling with reverberations, attention was drawn on how the linguistics of emancipation also contribute in erasing the distance between workers and intellectuals. Ruggeri's thoughts and considerations are collective, as they come from the factory and there they were elaborated, in synergy with the workforce. Without underestimating Ruggeri's profound analytical capacity, at this level he served as communicator

[51] Halyvourgiki is a Hellenic steel industry based in area of Elefsina, close to Athens. During the first stages of the economic crisis, its workers attempted an occupation and recuperation that was eventually repressed.

[52] An extract from the interview with Lacandona exemplifies this reconstruction: "We all live in the same society, but it's very important who you take inspiration from. [...] For us, it was very important to follow Vio Me, because it was the first effort [in Greece], such a big effort of such big impact" (Niovi, Lacandona).

bridging the gap between the workers of Argentina and elsewhere. As a result, distant workplaces had the opportunity to enter in contact and it became possible for Greek workers to seek inspiration amidst the prefigurative actions of the Argentinians, who spoke another language but voiced the same hopes of emancipation.

> We are distant countries, but there is a unity, there are things trespassing boundaries of language and bringing different experiences together, and I believe this is very important. (Ruggeri, II Euromediterranean, my translation).

The construction of a separate-but-open ecosystem where autogestión can be constantly discussed and the concerns of its participants shared was no less than fundamental to gather and channel reverberations. Tactics and strategies experimented inside distant workplaces had the opportunity to come across each other at the international Workers' Economy Gatherings, as well as during the 'regional' (continental) ones. Not by chance, their name recalls of the Zapatista's *encuentro* and aims to embody the same meaning.

> For what concerns the name of the meetings, I think it is important to point out that we opted for the name "Economia de los trabajadores" [Worker's Economy] because we perceived a lack of unity between the distant experiences of the workers [...]. We did not put 'autogestión', or 'meetings of the WRCs' or even 'cooperatives'. Nonetheless, the focus on autogestión is central, and we see it as a possibility to build an economy of the workers, a fairer economy, that can stand up as alternative to the capitalist system. (Ruggeri, II Euromediterranean, my translation)

Each *Encuentro* is a continuation of the previous meeting *and* a tabula rasa where relations between distant workers, scholars, activists and any other participants are reset to equals. In the circumstance, reciprocal acknowledgment as counterparts is key to having an environment where prefigurative knowledge can flow. The highest tangible hope is to be together in the process of constructing a 'new internationalism', one that according to its participants should subvert the monodirectional stream from the North to the periphery, replacing it with multiple interactions from Southern, marginal, working class actors. Still, the Encuentro has a strong focus on praxes transfer between the workers in autogestión, thus it is incomparable to other attractive but less circumscribed meetings, for instance the World Social Forum[53]. Each working group goes to the meetings hoping to increase their chances of networking, resistance and, ultimately, survival. Apart

[53] Which, due to its wide-ranging composition, was probably more easily hijackable by external and internal powers such as NGOs and professional activists (Hudig and Dowling 2010).

from the knowledge expansion, another potential outcome these meetings can generate are effective connections at the level of production, distribution and financing.

> [...] but the hope is also that we can coordinate better, organising a transmission of information, of solidarity, for an economic collaboration where we could exchange products and make the goods of our recuperated and cooperative businesses circulate. [...] Neoliberalism makes goods travel anywhere and forbids this to people. For this reason, these face to face meetings are crucial. We will never have a meeting in the US, for instance, because many Mexican or Latin American workers would not be permitted to attend. But as much as we were able to meet here, we must make our production and ideas circulate (Ruggeri, II Euromediterranean, my translation)

This approach is unreservedly shared by all the workers in autogestión, who see in the possibility of synergy a potentially lasting effect on their economic viability. Reverberations, at this level, can coagulate and become so thick as to sustain the synergetic efforts uniting distant workplaces. The delegation of Vio Me went to the VI Encuentro with this hope, presenting three straightforward proposals for effective collaborations between Greek and Argentinian workplaces. They had previously launched these propositions at national level, during the Panhellenic meeting in Karditsa and at UniverSSE in Athens.

> Our proposition to this meeting is the creation of institutions of funding and exchange between the WRCs, and to reach a minimum political agreement on this. We keep proposing to establish a solidarity fund directly financed and controlled by the workers collectively [...]. We could also make a fund to save money for workers to visit self-managed factories in other countries. A second proposition is an open solidarity logistic network, to freely distribute and transfer products from WRC to WRC, with an interchange between the factories. [...] Distribution should be done in another way: if we have two spaces producing different products (i.e. Vio Me and FraLib) we could save stocking spaces for the other factory's products. This would mean mass distribution, cheaper transports and access to affordable products, without middlemen and empowering relations between us to fantasise about the future: create another economy. [...] As we said, it is very important to talk about production, distribution and finance. (Vio Me workers, extracts of interventions from VI Encuentro, UniverSSE, Panhellenic Meeting, some parts are my translation).

Vio Me is not alone in seeking for a higher and more effective level of synergy amongst the workplaces, and during each of the meetings attended discussions were held about the creation of a Panhellenic credit cooperative, mutual funds, an Euromediterranean network for cooperative distribution, etc. Some kinds of effective collaboration are already present, given that every single workplace visited in Greece had in store Vio Me soaps for sale, accompanied by a label explaining

the solidarity call for their struggle. The problems emerge when workers try to scale up, and Francisco Martínez of Textiles Pigüé expressed his doubts on the feasibility of an intense coordination between them. The factory of Pigüé has an history of fruitful collaboration with Italian fair-trade organisations as well as many other international actors. Some of these agreements have now ceased, and this could be regarded as the cause of disillusionment. Yet, the history of Argentinian recuperations is replete with examples of synergy. For instance, Chilavert's desires for autogestión would have probably vanished if not thanks to IMPA's purchase of their old aluminium sheets for recycling, granting them some capital to restart the production. Today, especially considering the Latin American scenario, workplace to workplace reverberations seem to have slowed down. Proposals evaporate at the point where they could in fact coagulate to sustain a solidarity network of production, distribution and financing. Vio Me delegation was clearly disappointed on this matter after their visit to Argentina. One possible interpretation is that the long-term limits to synergetic efforts are due to the unbearable weight of capitalism and market constrictions over them. Or that, more simply, this is the point where two distant concrete utopias sharing similar but not identical prefigurative horizons cease to understand each other, and potentially the Greek or European interpretation of autogestión will seek another path for synergetic efforts.

Workplace-Community

The third kind of reverberations opens the door on the analysis of the dense flow connecting the workplaces with society. Rather than 'society' here the preferred word is 'community'. The reason for this will be given depth later, but it is worth anticipating that the community is seen as the locus where workplace-born politics might see their realisation. Mouffe (1991, p.70) argues that a community-driven project to radicalise democracy "requires the creation of a chain of equivalences among democratic struggles and therefore the creation of a common political identity among democratic subjects", here interpreted as the workers and the community.

> One thing I'd like to add is the fact of diffusion. And that all of this would not have happened if Halikouti wanted to be a 'great Halikouti' [meaning if the cooperative had only the aim to expand and enrich itself]. Instead, they wanted to diffuse the idea ... to share the ideas, not only as principles, but as knowledge, from their experience, from the working hands,

> on financial support, and wanted to be just a counterpart of an exchange. [...] This is not all going in one direction, it is bi-directional. (Worker of Tzepeto)

While the worker of Tzepeto refers to a workplace-workplace kind of reverberation, his significant theorisation is about the bi-directionality of the stream. Ultimately, he argues, a flow of knowledge coming from society – 'from a whole world' of experience – is spread among workers and, we here argue, can come back to society in another form. Society permeates the workplace and vice versa. This takes places when the transformative projects are shared and when the factory is open, transparent for its community, which is a prerogative of autogestión. The case of Vio Me Clinic, originally a social experiment in the city of Thessaloniki, and later embedded within the 'open walls' of Vio Me, portraits a potential outcome of the reverberations from the workplace to the community.

> At one point, in 2014, the workers of Vio Me took the initiative and came to our assembly of the Social medical centre asking to create a health clinic within Vio Me. The important part is that the initiative was taken by the workers, not by the healthcare personnel. It surged from their need. The predominant idea was to connect Vio Me to the society, and society with Vio Me. From 2014 until 2016, when we started operating, we got to know each other, find common elements and perspectives, meet in the street, participate in common assemblies and demonstrations. In the end we recognised common characteristics: self-management, autonomy, independence from the state, from political parties and markets, direct cooperativism, horizontal relations. The common ground we identified included also another kind of health care, a human need to reconceive health in its whole, where the patients are seen as incomers and doctors open dialogues, to open new fields of emancipation in other fields of life. In conclusion, we could say that the Clinic is connecting in praxes health with work. And our place inside a recuperated company is the place where notions like self-disposition, self-constitution, direct democracy, creativity and inspiration can live. (Dimitra, Vio Me Clinic, VI Encuentro)

The above is clearly an example of community outreach performed by the workers of Vio Me. Their will of expanding into society and including externals in the projects for autogestión is not a simple reverberation, but a conscious strategy for societal transformation and commoning. Yet, autogestión is not a post-colonial project[54], and as already explained at lenght, its nature is wide

54 De Sousa Santos argues that a person involved into an emancipatory project "knows from a trajectory that leads from ignorance, conceived of as colonialism, to knowledge conceived as of solidarity" (de Sousa Santos 1995, p.25-27). Autogestión comes with an expression of tangible solidarity, without which its expansion would be impossible.

open to different understandings. As such, autogestión does not represent any constriction for the community, and in fact it can only take root provided that it wins people over for its prefigurative potential. Workers are hence strategically thinking in terms of changing society, but they also personify a living example of emancipation. Without the latter captivating element radiated onto their society, their plans of outreaching would necessarily fail.

> With the collaboration of Thessaloniki social medical centre, we created an institution responsible for health inside the factory, that not only works against the existing system, but is autonomous, with an independent assembly and another where workers of the clinic and workers of Vio Me coexist. This is an example of how a liberated enterprise can give control back to society, and people in society can get involved in the struggle. We are just a tiny part of the working population, but with this mechanism we can give a boost to other parts of society that can replicate it, so to have a healthy society that has the common goal of destroying capitalism. (Worker of Vio Me, VI Encuentro)

At the same time, the Social Medical Centre of Thessaloniki had clear objectives and strategies on its own, and only by recognising the equivalence between theirs and Vio Me's perspectives, they reasoned about intertwining the two experiences. Independence, as always, must be granted to allow an equal relation of respect in the key of mutualism. Another mode in which the workplace of a recuperate company has prolonged its ramifications into society is illustrated by Textiles Pigüé. Benefitting from their rooted position and long experience in the territory, the factory became a nexus articulating the funds of a social programme (*Talleres Familiares*) for the promotion of small-scale businesses in the area. Aside from this role of connectors, they helped other social actors to start cooperatives and funds of microcredit.

> Obviously if you represent a business sector and you have experience, what you expect from this environment is that you share that experience and help others that want to start theirs. It is complicated, and in the case you named [the co-ops Garage, Manos Unidad, La Alternativa] was not easy at all. […] We helped them [Garage] in terms of technical assistance, knowledge of the activity, legal aspects, but not really to form the co-op because they managed that quite well by themselves. But we also acted as a nexus between them and the Ministry, to help them present the proposals for [to obtain funds from] the programs of public policies.
> Q: you think that your idea of social, solidarity economy, and the concepts of autogestión, arrived to them?
> A: According to me, there is a social interest, a conscience growing every day stronger, but the challenge is still huge and … dynamic. […] It is always difficult to abandon the mentality of individualism in favour of the associative one. (Lenor, Textiles Pigüé, my translation)

Textiles Pigüé appears to have chosen a more ordinary path to become entangled in their community projects and affect society with a transformative hope. Their main concern, after more than 15 years of existence, is on self-sustainability. The consequent relational strategies with local actors are less conflictual and more constructive – perhaps less radical than Vio Me – here including beneficial ties with institutions. The compromise they seek allows them to perpetrate their hopes of self-management, and as such is regarded as necessary and wise by many of its workers. On the other hand, their intellectual approach to society is as uncompromising as it was in the early times of the occupation. Nearly every Thursday Francisco 'Manteca' Martínez drives for more than six hours to reach Plaza de Mayo, Buenos Aires, to stand in the front row with the *Madres* as they march around the obelisk shouting all the names of the *desaparecidos* during the dictatorship. The participation workers in autogestión have within their societies, recurrently standing on the side of minorities and against oppressions of any kind, is a source of important reverberations they send into the community. That bi-directional flow observed by the worker of Tzepeto in Crete is crucial to maintain the momentum of emancipatory reverberations between the workplace and the community. Hence, whereas every reverberation was analytically schematised from one point to another, all of them are in a stream of *ida y vuelta* (coming and going).

> Therefore, if you absorb these concepts [of autogestión] of being another kind of worker, and the social compromise this means for you, it is then necessary to trespass boundaries. Because the only way to live this experience is to socialise it, generating an *ida y vuelta* with the community. Most of the initiatives we developed towards the external, with a key of political solidarity, resulted in transforming the cooperative *from* society. In the first years of the process of recuperation, with the conflict, the evictions and all that, the workers resisting to recuperate their source of labour were not seen under a positive light, by the community. Pigüé is a small town, pretty conservative, fairly isolated … and despite the fact that the same things were happening all over the country, here many people saw what we did as vandalism. As if they were saying "the factory went bankrupt, that's it. Why don't they look for another job?". Our attitude was undesirable and rebel. […] When we started demonstrating that we could put the factory back on its feet, that the project was sustainable, we also showed who we are and what we want for the workers of the community. It is something integral that you transmit, that generates support and raises the understanding of what you are defending. (Lenor, Textiles Pigüé, my translation).

The living example of being workers in autogestión is an extraordinary source of reverberations onto the community, as recalled by Lenor. Yet, without that bi-directionality of influence, the workplace would put itself in a higher moral position, becoming impenetrable and deaf to the feedback of the people they hope to conquer with their radical approach. The *Ida y Vuelta* between

workers and communities is a complex process not just consisting of reverberations. It embodies the potential intertwinement between the experience of the autogestión limited to the space and time of labour and its *social* version, which may ultimately redefine the community itself. Workers and non-workers become undistinguishable in a common project of transformation. The observable and projectable opportunities of rethinking the community together will be at the core of the next chapter.

Echoes and Trajectories

Reverberations crosscut the atmosphere above those social movements seeking horizontal emancipation and these workplaces in autogestión. I argue that they are the means through which the MST experience was able to perpetrate its broad social purposes and desires of change many years later in Greece. Yet, the echoes these reverberations offer to those willing to listen are not equal everywhere and anytime. In fact, after having observed them, we should consider three significant characteristics of this interpretative element.

First, the nature of reverberations is different depending on their source and destination. The ones connecting social movements to workplaces are extremely powerful, being able to change their nature to adapt from one context to another. Since one is a popular aggregation and the other a group of workers, these kinds of reverberations have the highest degree of flexibility to provide effective reapplications. This is the kind of reverberations more significant to comprehend the legacy of social movements beyond their disappearance. Reverberations directly connecting one workplace to another are, instead, particularly visible in the context of autogestión. These soundwaves are what makes these actors become *movement*. Yet, they are very contextual of our times, given that few of these distant workplace-workplace reverberations might have been spot in the past. At least, not with this intensity. Finally, the third variety of reverberations centre upon the role of 'living examples' played by workplaces in autogestión. Unlike the other two, this kind of soundwaves moves from this inherent dynamic, and benefits from the proximity of the community – that must be *political* beyond physical – to make the branches of autogestión extend beyond the factory walls;

Second, the common trait to all of them is that reverberations are destined to vanish quickly if devoid of prefigurative potential. The argument is that these soundwaves carry the core elements of autogestión, and being autogestión a prefigurative practice, its reverberations make its anticipatory seeds flow. Essentially, any workplace or community absorbing them needs to be capable of replicating *and* reinventing the message. Without constant renewal and a relentless activity of questioning them, reverberations become reiterations, their message crystallised, and their prefigurative capacity, necessary to constantly update the nature of their struggle against capitalism, disappears. Workers in autogestión seem aware of this process of deterioration. For instance, as the Argentinian WRC Chilavert learned from the struggle of the *Piqueteros* but questioned a path leading to unemployment, in turn the workers of Halikouti express the need to reconsider the message coming from the Argentinian WRCs for what concerns the issue of independence. This is the only way to keep reverberations flowing, constantly modified from the ones that preceded them;

Lastly, reverberations were presented as a linear flow: for instance, from one workplace to another. Still, as noted above, they are in fact bi-directional, and it would be interesting to enquire more deeply how Argentinian workplaces are influenced by the Greek experience. Moreover, we should add that reverberations are also circular. A distant and long-dated source of anti-hegemonic waves might become a new recipient. Intriguingly, the chosen location for the VII Encuentro of the Workers' Economy, held in September 2019, is the school of the MST in Brazil. Workers from Europe, Argentina and many other places in struggle meet where the 'Occupy, Resist, Produce' concept shaped decades ago, in a symbolic and synergetic reunion. A significant way to close a powerful and always mutating loop of reverberations. Without any doubt, new reverberations will invade the air and leave for distant shores right after the meeting.

7. Communalism

This chapter examines what lies beyond community outreach. In other words, we will consider how the workers' experiences are embedded within their community transformation, and what kind of political proposal they, together, seem to develop. Yet, projecting the transformative journey ahead is a hazardous exercise, whereas only considering what they have achieved so far is reductive. Conversely, the analysis can be built on their prefiguration, which considers both their anticipatory capacity *and* the revolutionary elements of their proposal already immanent and existing today.

With these premises, we could dare asking: what is autogestión leading to as a political project? This is the pragmatic and less utopian version of the question: what kind of society are these workers hoping to shape? Once again, answers will be found in what surfaces from their praxes as they develop. From the very beginning this was conceived as an analysis of something *in motion*, hence the answer to the question above can only be expressed in a progression of segments. Likewise, the final answer would necessarily leave doors open. Lastly, the analysis will cover the contradictions emerging at the most crucial stage, namely where social autogestión confronts the State.

The workers in self-management approach the labour class conflict perceiving themselves as a new subject, an encompassing 'we', or, using their definition, a 'community'. As such, they move in a direction towards what will be described as Communalism. This kind of societal transformation can be prefigured thanks to four factors they acquired from the experience of autogestión in the workplace, namely: their activity of reconstruction of broken bonds; an 'integral' approach allowing them to embrace broad social struggles as part of theirs; a growing, inclusive and mutualised political commitment; the capacity to reconfigure their labour and production as an activity of commoning.

> Firstly, we must prove ourselves, and then more people, that we can work without bosses. Secondly, we have to try to convince other movements, within and outside our groups, that we are community, in our mentality. And then that, in different aspects of society, we are trying to make suggestions for things that should be done here and now. (Worker of Halikouti)

> Community is central to any recuperation. Once a recuperation process has begun neighbours mobilize in support, and the workplace becomes a social centre for the community, with evening events, workshops and increasingly in Argentina, the bases for *Bachillerato Populares*, alternative high school degree programmes organized horizontally by people in the community (Sitrin 2016, p.142)

"We are community", pronounced by the worker of Halikouti, is a powerful statement implicating a reconstruction of broken bonds between different parts of so-called civil society, particularly the one between workers and citizens, joining forces in an alliance versus the global capital. The community as pivotal element around which a workplace-born project of autogestión can overflow and conquer social spaces has gradually emerged from interviews and observations of workers-citizens practices.

The recuperation process earlier described has in fact the purpose of reconstructing those broken bonds, putting at the centre of the communal map a social productive unit, namely the workers' cooperative. Likewise, reverberations cross-cut social movements and workplaces, connecting scattered ones and reinforcing extra-local interactions. They allow a singular anti-hegemonic community to exist thanks to the support from the 'subaltern cosmopolitism' of their many peers.

Nevertheless, no single human grouping ever existed which can be forcefully described as behaving as one individual. Any community is traversed by constant tensions between its members, up to the point where they defend or openly challenge their belonging to this social unit. Communities, throughout history, have formed, prospered, declined, disappeared. And being non-geographically defined (as opposed to the Nation State) it seems theoretically impossible to come up with a clear picture of what a community is, what a community wants, who belongs to it and who does not, and what is the common political project.

This conundrum can be tackled from the point of view of the workers. The first piece to unravel is what they mean when they use the word community.

> The meaning of community as we intend it is a net of people and groups that at least share anti-capitalistic politics. So, it's not like every cooperative is part of this network as we intend it. And also, Halikouti collective is connected with other groups not only in Rethymno or Crete, but also Greece and Europe, that share the same views. (Worker of Halikouti)

From this bit we already have three elements to come closer to defining this subject. First, the common socio-political horizon, or anti-capitalism. Second, the 'subaltern cosmopolitism' that connects different local communities *and* shapes a global anti-hegemonic community. As De Angelis observed (2017) "[a] radical transformation of our world implies that people come together into communities that develop these alternatives to the logic of capitalism, multiply them and interconnect them" (p.11). Thirdly, the praxes-based exclusion criteria: whether labelled as a co-op or not, a working unit is part of the 'community' not for formal adhesion, nor for imposition, and not even for its name, but rather for its *tangible* political attitude. We can further deepen the features of this 'community' by considering the intimate mutualism between citizens and workers that characterises it. The Italian side of the autogestión movement, and especially the assemblies held at the WRC RiMaflow, came up with the concept of 'conflictual mutualism' that contains both the synergetic element and the anti-hegemonic one[42]. A piece of the thrilling story of Chilavert can illustrate what we mean by understanding this as an intimate 'conflictual mutualism' between workers and citizens shaping their community.

> [...] four squads with four policemen each and a truck came to evict eight workers. Between them and the police stood about 200 persons, mostly citizens, neighbours, people of the assemblies, university comrades ... thanks to them the eviction was avoided, and this is the reason why Chilavert has the policy of 'open doors'. Here we print books, but not just that. We have the Document Centre of the Facultad Abierta, the cultural centre 'Chilavert Recupera' open to the community, the *Bachillerato* which is a secondary school, all of these in the factory. The concept behind 'open doors' is this: these are spaces for the broad community. [...] One of the initial problems the workers had to face was how to release the book they printed [the book was "Qué son las asambleas populares?" (Bielsa 2002)]. There was always a police patrol in front of their door, controlling everything entering or leaving the place apart from the workers – by then they had only achieved the right to look after the building. A neighbour came and he told them "you see this wall between the factory and my house? Once there was an air conditioning system, now there's just a hole. Pass me the books through the hole and we'll get them out from my house". That's how the production of Chilavert really restarted, and that's how it went on until October 2002 when

> they finally obtained the first expropriation law granting them the right to sell what they printed. All the hundred copies of their books passed through this hole and were distributed using the neighbour's car. (Worker of Chilavert)

The anecdote is almost hard to believe, yet it brilliantly illustrates the shared anti-hegemonic efforts, the creativity of the subjects, the reciprocal openness and mutualist acknowledgement, ultimately providing solid bases to let us perceive what belonging to a subaltern community means. Silvia from La Cacerola says, more synthetically, "this cooperative would not have been here if not for our efforts, but our efforts alone would not have made it possible" (my translation). In this apparent paradox, the community *enters* the cooperative, while the cooperative, or the workers, *exit* the workplace to merge with their peers, or *compañeros*. Together they act politically, counter-hegemonically and, ultimately, autonomously. Their autonomy is clearly expressed in the tale of Chilavert: the policeman patrolling their door represent control, and by passing the books through the hole and selling them against the law they become out of control, hence autonomous.

If the community is a subject where the utopia of autonomy born within the workplaces becomes intelligible and shared by those outside the factory, then inevitably it will widen and strengthen. Chantal Mouffe (1991; 1992) correctly argues that the necessity of a sense of community emerges in an historical stage where the concept of 'class' is in crisis. To belong to a community means to acquire a precise political identity, and to become aware of the possibility of a radicalisation of current democracies.

A community here is understood not as instrumental, but as Sandel (1998) upholds, as 'constitutive' for the very identity of the individuals. Mouffe (1991) writes that "it is a mode of human association that recognizes the disappearance of a single substantive idea of the common good and makes room for individual liberty. It is a form of association that can be enjoyed among relative strangers belonging to many purposive associations and whose allegiances to specific communities are not seen as conflicting with their membership in the civil association" (Mouffe 1991, pp. 76-77). And she concludes "This modern form of political community is held together not by a substantive idea of a common good but by a common bond, a public concern. It is therefore a community without a definite shape, a definite identity, and in continuous reenactment" (p.77). It is, as previously observed, a non-linear, open-ended approach, where the collective subject stands in a constant movement, carefully avoiding ideological traps.

> But the real objective of Micropolis, the task of social and solidarity economy structure, is the creation of a small and autonomous community. The community has been created here and now, in direct and tangible terms, surpassing the always dangerous dimension of ideologies. It is based on common meeting places, on consultation, and aims to develop relationships between individual activities.
> (Statement of Micropolis, II Euromediterreanean Meeting, my translation)

According to Block (2018) there is an intangible component sustaining the process. He describes the community as an experience rooted in the sense of belonging. Compared to Mouffe, he insists more on the importance of affective politics cross cutting a group that perceives itself as moving towards a common direction. "We are in community each time we find a place where we belong. The word *belong* has two meanings. First and foremost, to belong is to be related to and a part of something. It is membership, the experience of being at home in the broadest sense of the phrase. It is the opposite of thinking that wherever I am, I would be better off somewhere else. [...] The opposite of belonging is to feel isolated and always (all ways) on the margin, an outsider. To belong is to know, even in the middle of the night, that I am among friends" (Block 2018, p.xii). During the field research it was evident how these workers, most of them previously stuck in undesirable jobs or unemployed, found a home in their new cooperatives. Moreover, they demonstrated how their sense of belonging extends to their neighbourhoods, towns or cities. As if, having recuperated a desirable workplace, they now *came together* with their communities.

When Mouffe (1991; 2000) describes the new form of identity a community must give to itself, she makes a careful consideration about the forces at stake. For what concerns private interests, she argues that "it is a matter not of establishing a mere alliance between given interests but of actually modifying the very identity of these forces" (Mouffe 1991, p.80). And she adds "This is something many pluralist liberals do not understand because they are blind to relations of power" (p.90), referring to the fact that some groups constituted themselves by excluding or subordinating others (women, to begin with). This must be dismantled by that process of unlearning explained before, and replaced by a new identity that, according to Mouffe, should be upheld by 'radical democratic citizens'.

Here, however, we claim that not only 'community' is their political identity, but that actors such as these new cooperatives operating in contemporary forms of disaggregated societies, are powerful forces to construct communities and infuse in them a political direction. Across the labour literature we find examples of how a workers' cooperative is a central element in the post-capitalist

scenario (Sharzer 2017). We can deduce that these co-ops can be elements of a mutating world, and that their influence can reach the social arena for further change. Ana Dinerstein's statement on the Vio Me website said: "remember that you are anticipating the future in the present". These co-ops are venturing off into the unknown, yet they are just a piece of a broader community with whom they share the same prefigurative desires.

A radical democratic citizen, as described by Mouffe (1992), shares with her/his community concerns for equality and liberty, and is moved by those in all areas of social life. "No sphere is immune from those concerns, and relations of domination can be challenged everywhere" (1991, p.81). What workers in self-organisation are trying to achieve is to reach a form of mutual, non-imposed commitment where, precisely, all relations of domination are put to the test. Hierarchies are the first obstacle to overcome and the last enemy to get rid of when, accustomed to work and life relations in a neoliberal society, we try to move onto a communalist one, a de-alienated one. "Nevertheless, we are not dealing with a purposive kind of community affirming one single goal for all its members, and the freedom of the individual is preserved" (1991, p.81).

Importantly, Mouffe (1992) stands for a multiplicity of possible citizenships. A thought shared by those citizens in self-organised groups, that rely on the power of the assembly as the main instrument to reach their ends. As for social anarchists, means and ends should both be fit for the purpose (Gibson 2013), thus we could argue that the assembly is pivotal not just as a means but as an end in itself. Mouffe (1991) is opposing the idea that "the exercise of citizenship consists in adopting a universal point of view", in fact "there can be as many forms of citizenship as there are interpretations of those [ethico-political] principles [of modern democracy]" (p.81). The only minimum common denominator should be that there are no rules unless those decided together, in an assembly, without any forms of prevarication, imposition, violence or lack of respect for anyone.

A conclusive story can exemplify the inclusiveness of the community as imagined by the workers, as much as the pervasiveness of the re-conceptualisation in action. Lenor of Textiles Pigüé recalls how the labourers of the recuperated factory, after having decided to open their doors to many communal initiatives (the aforementioned *'ida y vuelta'*), decided collectively to address the difficulties of a single person.

> We recently had an experience with a guy, a 20-year-old, that became an associate of the cooperative as a result of a broader engagement with the community. He has been with us for more than a year now … with lots of difficulties. And you think, for instance, when you discuss our internal behaviour, the rules everyone has to abide by, the shifts, the respect and things like that … and then you have a particular situation, as was the case of this guy. Many times, he would sleep during his shifts, he got into conflictual situations, and it is hard for him to face his comrades. […] We have organised several meetings to talk about this situation, one person only, him. Is this correct? It does not matter, he might be one, but he's worth it. (Lenor, Textiles Pigüé, my translation).

The argument here expressed is that even when they do not frame themselves as such, these experiences are *communities*. The reasons for this can be found in their behaviours: they challenge the concept of class and radicalise while reconstructing broken bonds with the social fabric; they generate a sense of mutual belonging to the experience and to their geographical place; they are in continuous re-enactment to challenge power relations both internal and external; they act inclusively and extend the process of un-learning into their collectivity. Most importantly, no one is forcing them or any citizen to participate in this communal endeavour. As Bookchin (2015) noted, no single community across history was a municipal venture set down by social contract. On the contrary, every community was and is an "ethical unity of free citizens"(p.22).

> First of all, we named ourselves 'community', because we didn't want to be a cooperative, in a way. We are a cooperative but … you understand in which way, right? We don't see it as a business, as if we were a cooperati … a coopera … a cooperation … I don't know what! We're community. We just needed a tool, a legal form to work with it. (Worker of Apo Kinou)

Prefiguring Communalism

During the final plenary of the III Euromediterranean Meeting held at RiMaflow in April 2019, Gigi Malabarba (one of the organisers) reminded those present that in two years' time they will have to organise celebrations for the one hundred and fifty years since the Paris Commune. The event is unsurprisingly central in the mythology of the workers in self-management. The aim of this section is to consider and discuss the traces of a Communalist conceptualisation of society coming into view amidst these workers' praxes and politics. To begin with, one could wonder where the word Communalism comes from. According to Bookchin (2015), it originated during those extraordinary days of 1871, and it was a way for the members of the Paris Commune to define what they intended

to create and temporarily achieved before the brutal repression: "a nationwide confederation of cities and towns to replace the republican nation-state" (p.15).

Communalism, in synthesis, is the vision of a society organised in popular assemblies bound together in a confederation, questioning all forms of hierarchy and expanding ideals of anarchism, ecology and decentralisation to embed every contemporary struggle (*Ibid.,* p.xv). Throughout this last chapter, I will investigate what autogestión as prefiguration leads to. Once we have framed their subjectivity under the definition of 'community', we can try to understand what is the prefigurative goal of their actions. I claim that, while the utopia of Communalism is certainly not within reach of these workers and their communities, nonetheless it is the horizon they, together, aim for.

Defining Communalism

Communalism can be understood as an "overarching political category, […] From Marxism, it draws the basic project of formulating a rationally systematic and coherent socialism that integrates philosophy, history, economics, and politics. Avowedly dialectical, it attempts to infuse theory with practice. From anarchism, it draws its commitment to antistatism and confederalism, as well as its recognition that hierarchy is a basic problem that can be overcome only by a libertarian socialist society" (*Ibid.*, p.15).

Bookchin's Communalism contains nonetheless a critique of anarchism, in particular to the mythos of self-regulation that fostered a highly individualistic approach to human problems within this school of thought (Bookchin 1995). Communalism represents on the contrary the *utility* of mass action and the necessity to make public concerns become private. Similarly, Bookchin struggled to be appreciated by his contemporary anarchists for his proposal of a libertarian municipalism, envisaging a local scale institution working openly through a city assembly. Yet, given that the proposal was centred around an institution, this was blindly discarded even by those whose hearts Bookchin was trying to conquer (Biehl, Janet 2007).

The state is a central problem for Communalism, yet the presupposition here is that while privileges are vehiculated and hierarchies perpetrated through the governmental institution, we must recognise the progress and rupture the state represented for history as much as Marx and Engels

acknowledged the merits of capitalism (Marx and Engels 2002). The state is viewed as a societal organisation that has exhausted its potential and is now compressing a society ripe for a further step. The act of rupture would consist of the re-appropriation of politics, that, as Bookchin recalls, is "almost by definition, [...] the active engagement of free citizens in the handling of their municipal affairs and in their defense of its freedom", or more straightforwardly "the direct governing of the city by its citizens" (Bookchin 2015., pp.11-12). As in the example below of Communalism implemented in Rojava, Syrian Kurdistan:

> The base level is the commune. In the cities, a commune usually encompasses 30-200 households in a residential street, and in the countryside a whole village. [...] "The commune is the smallest unit and the basis of the system of Democratic Autonomy. It is concerned with meeting the needs of the people" [...] A commune's coordinating board consists of its two co-chairs (one woman and one man) and one representative. [...] Every resident can take part in these meetings. [...] The next level up is the neighbourhood, usually comprising seven to thirty communes. [...] Delegates from the communes to the councils are subject to imperative mandate. (Knapp and others 2016, pp. 87-89).

Communalism puts the assembly at the centre stage, as driving force for a society in "protective balance with the natural world" (Bookchin 2015, p.14). The configuration a communalist philosophy might take in our society is that of a libertarian municipalism (Biehl and Bookchin 1998). The municipal level is fertile according to Bookchin, as it appears today for the reconceptualization of a 'glocal' society, where only addressing global issues at small-scale level we have some chance to provoke a fundamental change (Harmsworth 2001). Petropoulou (2013) interprets this concept arguing that collectivities transform societies by "trying to change each moment in their daily life collectively, and self-organised, thus promoting local development" (p.62). The latter concept is intended not as a continuous economic growth but rather along the social political ecology of Bookchin (2002). As such, it has a critical stance towards the capitalistic growth and embraces instead the theory of degrowth (Latouche 2006; Kallis, Kerschner, and Martinez-Alier 2012).

> But what is reasonably clear to me [...] is that bourgeois society cannot continue its devastation of the ecosphere without destroying the biotic and climatic foundations of its own existence. If society as such is to survive, it must produce a radically new humanity-nature dispensation. That is, we will either create a society that fosters the fecundity of biotic evolution and that makes life an ever-more conscious and creative phenomenon, or produce a world that tears down these ecological elements. This precludes a society guided by the maxim "grow or die" – the immanent bourgeois drive to reduce the organic to inorganic in an ever-competitive frenzy of capital expansion and human exploitation.

> Capitalism has made social evolution hopelessly incompatible with ecological evolution (Bookchin 1982, pp.13-14).

This overarching conceptualisation elaborated by Murray Bookchin and, more recently, Abdullah Öcalan (2005; 2015), has reached the ears of the movement of autogestión. For Greece, Confederalist hints arrived with the stories of the Kurdish Revolution, which are having a remarkable impact on the anti-hegemonic discourses of these times, particularly in Europe. These reverberations found in Greece a fertile ground in which to root especially for the anti-institutional feeling permeating the civil society after the 2015 referendum. Furthermore, the strong ecological position was viewed as giving primary attention to the most urgent need of our time. While the revolution in Rojava is the source and inspiration, Greek workers in self-management acknowledge their experience is incomparable. Yet, they argue, it is worth reasoning about Communalism since it is, in fact, "a global proposal".

> […] We are very connected with the Kurdish movement. We organised a series of meetings here in Heraklion about them. And inside the Integral Coop we try to present and implement these ideas. Of course, these are not easy ideas to digest. As I said before, here is obviously quite different from what is happening in Syria. […] But the idea of the Kurdish movement is, let's say, a global proposal. It's close to the Zapatistas movement, we can say it's the new revolutionary idea of our times. (Michalis, ICH)

The connections with the Argentinian side of autogestión are present, yet less evident. The VI Encuentro held at Textiles Pigüé saw the participation of Azize Aslan, a Kurdish Mexican-based researcher collaborating with John Holloway and personally engaged with both the Communalism-driven cooperatives in Kurdistan and the movement of self-management worldwide. Her contributions focus on the convergence between the practices of autogestión and the centrality of the workers' cooperative for the Communalist system (Aslan 2016).

Communalism sets at the centre of its economy the workers' cooperative (Curl 2012). Where the confederalist structure of councils and assemblies embody the idea of direct democracy, the workers' cooperative whose production is collectively managed is the prototype of a post-capitalist working unit. Fascinatingly, it has been also described as a pre-capitalist structure for labour (Patronis and Papadopoulos 2002; Vakoufaris et al. 2007). Workplaces in autogestión are operating in a context where it is nearly impossible to collectively manage the production at community level. Yet, they are constantly aiming at reinforcing the intertwinement with their communities at the point where both actors can collectively decide about what they need. As in the examples across

the manuscript when workers insist on an 'economy of needs', or when they argue that is the community to decide whether another cafeteria is needed or not.

Communalism requires a community able to decide collectively without external or superior impositions. Autogestión is capable of creating strong community ties at the point where the workers describe themselves as 'community' and begin to reason communally with other empathetic actors outside the workplace. The level of autonomy Communalism calls for coincides with the ideal of autonomy the workers in autogestión strive for. The reconceptualization of society proposed by Communalism falls close to the process of un-learning and recuperating enacted by autogestión.

The workers in self-management navigate the open veins of capitalism, and constantly confront institutional pressure. As such, they cannot dream of being workers' cooperatives in a Communalist society. Nonetheless, I argue that their philosophy converges with the Communalist one, and their praxes looks like a prototype of the Communalist workers' co-op. If we consider their capacity to become community and their ability to prefigure, we can say these subjects carry embryos of Communalism.

Their prefiguration is at the centre of the analysis. Still, it is nearly impossible to observe and study what these workers will anticipate if they will be capable of doing so. We need to focus on the elements we can observe today. Fascinatingly, some elements of their Communalist behaviour can be spotted here and now. As argued by different scholars (Ward 2017; bergman and Montgomery 2017), they are immanent, perhaps only at an embryonic stage, but precisely for this reason they must be protected, projected and illustrated.

In the next sections I will thus dissect the visible elements I consider as anticipatory of Communalism within autogestión. I identified four interlinked factors that are worth deepening for their originality in terms of political prefiguration. In the first section I will discuss two of them, namely the workers' capacity of reconnecting broken bonds and to embracing 'integral revolutions'. In the second I consider their interpretation of everyday commoning and the political commitment they generate as essential to imagine a Communalist future.

The philosophy behind this concept is clearly expressed by the mantra anyone can hear at the meetings of the workers in autogestión: "no one left behind". Despite the simplicity of the idea vis à vis the unbearable complexity of their task, this thought must be regarded as a driving force behind any of their actions. Just to mention a few, the feminist liberation, the reconsideration of the environmental resources, the desires of direct democracy, the call for supporting migrants, are all part of the project and prefiguration of autogestión. The workers of Apo Kinou call it "integral revolution" for its encompassing nature. De Sousa Santos (2007) notes that such an approach allows the dismantling of "unified and homogenous categories such as class, gender, and nation-state" (p.xxxiv). Once negated, deconstructed and analysed each of these, the proposal seems to be that of a "subaltern cosmopolitism" (*Ibid.*). A counter-hegemonic universe co-existing with capitalism and states, where local and extra-regional forces are in a constant dialogue to preserve their alterity against the pervasiveness of the global capital. It is also a constellation of knowledges, practices and approaches, all different yet all prefiguring a similar (concrete) utopia for both workers and communities.

The straightforwardness of "no one left behind" is used to point that no single liberation struggle can be addressed unless if together with all the others, but also to extend their subjectivity to any unemployed, migrant, oppressed, marginalised, etc. These workers discuss and practice politics in the sense that they have an intersectional slant towards society. The worker of Apo Kinou argued that they, as a collective, need to consider what the needs of their community are, both practical *and political*. The moments when the movement of autogestión gathers, such as the Encuentros or the Euromediterranean, are used precisely to discuss how to address the role of autogestión in the public sphere, here including how the workers should position themselves in relation to feminism, the LGBTQ+ community, the institutional xenophobia, the exploitation of natural resources, etc. These discussions are perhaps surprisingly at the centre of a stage where one could expect to hear mostly debates on the practicalities of the internal organisation, the production, the distribution.

[55] This definition was translated from the discussions held during the III Euromediterranean meeting at RiMaflow, April 2019.

There is evidence that these workers interpret these two apparently distant tasks as one. Discussions on broad social issues are both internalised – as in the case of a feminist reconsideration of the duties within each of their organisations – as much as embraced to advocate for them in other non-workers arenas.

> And that's why the liberated enterprise has a purpose to give back control to society, and that people in society get involved in this struggle. Because all our co-fighters might be very few if we think about the working population, but we believe we are a piece in the mechanism that changes the whole society. We are only a tiny part of it, but this mechanism can give a boost to the other parts of society (so they might create their mechanisms), so to have a healthy society that has the goal to destroy capitalism. (Worker of Vio Me, VI Encuentro)

Perhaps the goal of destroying capitalism is utopian, but the concrete part of it is expressed in the tangible idea of "giving back control to society", juxtaposed to the "liberated enterprise". The categories of control and liberation might clash, still their purpose is to put society in charge of its destiny. Hence, rather than a revolutionary idea with a clear political purpose, they are saying they do not know what society might eventually do with its hypothetical freedom. They only say they want society to be back in control, versus the State, the market and the capital. Therefore, what kind of tools are they equipping this imagined society with?

> Q: In which other sectors would you like to see similar horizontal forms of structure and organization?
> A: In all sectors![15]

> The medical centre hopes for the creation of a community of health as a part of a broader self-managed community [...] advancing the proposal of autogestión in every aspect of life[56].

Their hope is to replicate the structure and the philosophy of autogestión in society, with the assembly as the core element, the horizontal relationships, the openness and transparency, the inclusiveness, the extra-regional networking, etc. This integral approach faces altogether the interlocking crises affecting our times on multiple levels. All of them are present in the daily construction of autogestión within the workplace, and every element defines the actions of the workers with their community. Their project is *political* precisely because it has virtually no possible

[56] https://unicornriot.ninja/2019/workers-healthcare-center-of-vio-me-created-by-the-workers-for-the-community/

definitive achievement. And its objectives are integral, given that their goal is, in fact, not just to recuperate, resist and produce but to redefine relationships, reconstruct bonds, dismantle categories and occupy the imaginary of our lives.

> Lastly, I believe that this must be a place where we debate and conceive a new project of society, a new economy, and culture, that overcomes capitalism but that can equip us with the tools to fight against it from our place of work and thinking. This is clearly a long-term goal, not something we will achieve in three days and not even something we have achieved so far, but it is the objective that we must aim to have. For this reason, I believe the Encuentro de la Economia de los Trabajadores is a process. (Ruggeri, II Euromediterranean, my translation).

From an external point of view this might appear completely unrealistic given that not only is their impact marginal but so is their capacity to implement what they hope is constricted by external forces. Despite this, the movement of autogestión is building and reinforcing subterranean channels of experimentation that exceed the factory and permeate their society. Each experience has a range of methods, but the most radical approach can be exemplified by the concept of Integral Revolution the workers of Crete are adhering to. This approach envisages the construction of a territorial network of "autonomous projects of collective initiative" (Dafermos 2017, p.9) to develop a "self-sufficient economy that is autonomous from the State and the capitalist market" (*Ibid.*). The tools used comprise using alternative currencies, launching community initiatives, cooperative social funds, self-organised basic income programmes, barter markets, common stores, etc. All these behave counter-hegemonically while still being under the rule of capital. The Integral Coop of Heraklion, for instance, is implementing "economic disobedience", where local profits escape the suction of capital by travelling through local currencies, so that "nobody can control you" (Michalis, ICH). By following this approach the integral principles are adopted and practiced at workplace level – rejecting discrimination, having a feminist agenda, and including LGBTQ+ workers, just to mention a few –, embraced at private and intimate level – dismantling socially constructed categories that cause oppression – and eventually they overflow onto the community.

The Integral Revolution approach is worthy of consideration being the most radical proposal advanced by the workers in autogestión so far, and the most encompassing one. Bookchin (1982) noted that "It has become clear to me that it was the *unity* of my views – their ecological holism, not merely their individual component – that gave them a radical thrust" (p.67). By using the

resources provided by autogestión these workers dare experimenting with tools of liberation, aiming to address each problem integrally. The Integral Revolution is perhaps the most precise conceptualisation of how autogestión could be implemented at societal level. An integral slant characterises the attitude of these workers towards their communities. On the level of subjectivity, the workers see themselves as a tiny part of a universe made by multiple 'damned of the Earth', whose liberation is bound with theirs. Hence, the recuperated factory or the small cooperative cafeteria are just points of departure for a communal political experience. From here, they aim at recomposing multiple lonelinesses and shape a global subaltern community.

On an everyday basis, the workers in autogestión are enacting these principles by openly challenging the insecurity generated by the neoliberal crises. As Bauman (2013a) observed, insecurity grips every one of us, immersed into an impalpable and unpredictable universe of flexibility, precarity, competitiveness and endemic haziness. Still, our anxiety is invariably considered an individual problem, a consequence of private failures, and a personal challenge to win. Beck (2005) noted that we are persuaded that we need individual solutions for systemic contradictions, and we seek private salvation for common problems.

Coming back to the capacity these workers have of rejoicing their communities, we should focus on what they overthrow and what they create. Block (2018) wrote that "we are living in an age of isolation" (p.1) and that "the social fabric of our culture is more fragile than we imagine" (p.7). Rather than accepting these premises, the praxes of autogestión break the individualistic wall aiming at increasing the existing amount of belonging and relatedness.

Rosenberg (2002) coined a vivid picture of the result of this process, naming it 'warm circle'. According to this theory, the historical form of community that has vanished in our present time rotated around bonds of loyalty existing within the 'warm circle'. There was no logic of costs-benefits behind this, nor any external pressure. The warmth of the circle was given by its refusal of selfish quantitative analyses and of anything today labelled as 'rational' that, in fact, is simply cold and monochrome. We already stumbled upon few examples of this behaviour embraced by the workers. It is worth recalling the consideration of a member of Tzepeto: "I really rate trust very high. […] We'll never compromise with people we don't trust. Nevertheless, once trust is accomplished, it is the art of compromising that allows people to proceed even when they have different … not different views, but different ways". And for what concerns the absence of costs-benefits logic the

example of Lacandona and the denial of quantifiable labour is remarkable. They show there is an ongoing attempt of bringing warmth back into the present.

All these processes of destruction of frozen certainties and creation of warm elements exist in a tension. It must be always remembered that autogestión as prefiguration is a 'not-yet' (Dinerstein 2015). When discussing the ideal community, Bauman (2013a) wrote that it personifies the kind of world we unfortunately cannot have, or the one we desperately hope to recover. Williams (2001) observed that the most extraordinary aspect of the 'community' is that it always existed in the past, and yet it is always ahead of us. The 'warm circle' of the communal experience can hence be described either as a lost paradise or a heaven we long for. Yet, we can argue, it seeds can be found here. The community that will grow from them will undoubtedly live in a constant tension with external (and even internal) forces, and hardly become a 'warm circle'. Still, what it embodies is a challenge to the cold neoliberalism and frozen capitalist relations of today. And these workers in autogestión are among the ones igniting the embers.

Commoning and Committing

The third element the workers put on the table on their way to prefiguring a Communalist society is their capacity of commoning. To appreciate it, we should begin from a critique of the 'natural' way in which communities reproduce themselves. Workers argue that social reproduction is not given, and that we can act upon it. If we do not address how communities reproduce themselves, the process and the repetition of power structures, there cannot be a serious challenge to capitalist relations. As Bolívar Echeverría (1998) reminds us, human beings are 'condemned' to permanently create, reinvent, update, modify or ratify the social forms of our concrete communities (p. 166). And this constant reinterpretation and reaggregation with others in always mutating forms is what we call politics, or "the capacity of human beings to impress a more or less stable and unique shape to our sociality" (Aguilar 2017, p. 81).

The workers are proactively part of this process of reinterpretation at communal level, and they can produce change from the workplace by adopting the philosophy of the commons, hence entering a process of commoning. By commons we mean "a plurality of people (a community) sharing

resources and governing them and their own relations and (re) production processes through horizontal doing in common, commoning" (De Angelis 2017, p.10). Commoning is here understood as the previously missing link between workplace and society, or the process by which workers in self-management re-categorise their labour and life outside the capitalist scheme, recompose the fictional distance between themselves and the society. Abandoning the profit-driven mentality, reconstructing labour relations as human relations, overturning hierarchical schemes to favour horizontality, are ways in which the workers perform commoning. "Commoning is thus, therefore, an ongoing dance of values, kept together by the rhythm of our daily reproduction and the decisions that need to be communally taken in given contexts" (*Ibid.*, p.xiii). This dance of values permanently debated and open to unpredictable transformations configures an organic society, where labour becomes a common and can be discussed at community level, as much as any other aspect of the communal life. It is worth recalling the concept of an 'economy of needs' based on what the community requires and desires, expressed by the workers of Apo Kinou. In the same spirit, the collective of Tzepeto sees itself as a proactive *and* receiving part of the local ecosystem and is hence capable of thinking communally.

> Another thing I learned is that our assembly, apart from what we'd really like to do, is for what the community needs to be done. For example, we get to the point where we say "we don't need another cafeteria in this town, we don't care if Vargos wants to open another cafeteria. We think that in Rethymno we cannot handle another". So, we can instead see what other things we want, in a net of people, of a community, and we should look to that direction.
> (Worker of Tzepeto)

Gibson-Graham (2006) believe that local communities should determine/record their own needs and resources, aiming to highlight the possibilities that can be further developed and exploitative structures that should be challenged (p.64). In the example above, the cafeteria itself becomes a component to be collectively managed for the community. The experience of Pagkaki in Athens can be recalled illustrating the convergence between autogestión and the concept of commoning.

The intention of this collective has been, from the very beginning, to embrace and promote the philosophy of the commons, interpreted as the theoretical antipode of the neoliberalist policies sinking Greece into the austerity and the crisis. Pagkaki configured its process of commoning along two dimensions. The first is internal, and it began when it was agreed to make common both the property and the products of the *kafeneion*. No single member owns a share of the cafeteria, which

in turn belongs to the cooperative in its entirety. The categories of owners and employees are cancelled, and labour is no longer conceived as a surplus-driven activity. Everyone is equally paid, and the shifts are of identical length, with a constant rotation of duties. Each member of Pagkaki has the same right to vote in the assembly whose aim is to reach consensus or the highest possible shared agreement among the members (Kioupkiolis and Karyotis, 2015).

These peculiar features of Pagkaki are what constitutes the backbone of autogestión and are generally shared by all the other collectives encountered so far. Yet, Pagkaki started from a conceptualisation of the commons to reach this configuration. The second dimension is in fact collective, and its objective is to construct a space of communication, of political debate, of socialisation, accessible to the community of the neighbourhood. The explicit aim of Pagkaki is to create a wide political network to support every experience at any level subscribing to the same ideals they have. Hence the goal is to create a "just and autonomous society for everyone" (*Ibid.*, p.13). This is the reason behind the birth of the network Kolektives, which was the first attempt in Greece to create laces between experiences of production, distribution and activism with the same 'out of control' attitude. By expanding autogestión into their social fabric, these workers prefigure a transformative "community of commoners" (De Angelis 2017, p.11) where each decision is collectively taken, and hierarchies are replaced by mutualism in every relationship. The result of the act of commoning is a form of local development creating what they call "ecosystem" (Michalis, ICH).

The theory of the commons[57] is a pivotal starting point for many experiences of self-management and self-organisation at any level. For thousands of workers in autogestión it represented a

[57] On this I benefit from the recapitulation made by Federici on why the commons became central, as well as on their limitation as political project. "There are important reasons why this apparently archaic idea has come to the center of political discussion in contemporary social movements. Two in particular stand out. On the one side, there has been the demise of the statist model of revolution that for decades has sapped the efforts of radical movements to build an alternative to capitalism. On the other, the neoliberal attempt to subordinate every form of life and knowledge to the logic of the market has heightened our awareness of the danger of living in a world in which we no longer have access to seas, trees, animals, and our fellow beings expect through the cash-nexus. [...] The idea of the common/s [...] has offered a logical and historical alternative to both state and private property, the state and the market, enabling us to reject the fiction that they are mutually exclusive and exhaustive of our political possibilities. [...] Nevertheless, ambiguities as well as significant differences exist in the interpretation of this concept, which we need to clarify, if we want the principle of the commons to translate into a coherent political project" (Federici 2012, pp.138-139).

theoretical toehold to grab when picturing their experience ahead. The commons are undoubtedly a powerful and rich approach for any anti-hegemonic attempt, especially for their uncompromising attitude with existing private and public structures. Such an approach constitutes a safe harbour from which to launch a ship and begin a transformative journey in a world of capitalist-exploited relationships and dynamics. Moreover, it is in fact an open-ended theory, which is both a blessing and a curse. By being open it could be seen as faithful to the logic of the assembly and the libertarian spirit of these workers, without a predetermined path to follow, hence perhaps capable of avoiding the traps of their predecessors. Yet, the lack of an end point can be interpreted as the inexistence of a horizon, which in turns might rob the workers of the transformative energies they need for their daily struggles. The commons lack of a practical framework of implementation and are thus not sufficient per se to reach an agreement of what the next step to take should be, collectively. This debate is at the centre of each workers' meeting, as demonstrated by the discussions held at the III Euromediterranean at RiMaflow in April 2019.

Nevertheless, along their prefigurative journey these workers find energy from another element, the fourth we will consider as an immanent characteristic of Communalism. I claim that their political commitment mutualised with the other like-minded actors of the community breeds the much-needed horizon for aforementioned "community of commoners". Bookchin (1993) observed this process from an historical perspective. He argued that the experiences of self-management and self-government across history were undoubtedly different from each other. Some brought to occupations of territorial institutions and control over the citizens, others – such as the Zapatista – aimed at a subtraction of a territory from state control. Still, he argues, all the experiences ethically aligned with Communalism shared the fundamental element of the creation of a common political culture. The basis of a genuine citizenship is a jointly practiced political life. It is constituted by a profound interaction between the individual and the community, and on an ideal of politics as the vehicle to acquire wisdom from the discussion of the *res publica*. For the ancient Athenians this was condensed in the word *paideia* (παιδεία), or the incessant enlightenment shaping each one's personality through active participation. The distance between this interpretation of the political life and our habits of passively listening and voting is noteworthy.

What these workers do when enacting the practice of commoning is to institute a transparent relationship built on mutual support within their communities, between distant communities. If

they are to be capable of extending this relationship also between the community and the environment, they will abide by what Bookchin (1993) considered to be the foundation of a *real* political culture, towards the *paideia*. Such a positioning allows them to spot and valorise any sort of resistant alterities within their communities. From them we can expect a collective, participated and shared form of politics. We use the words 'politics' and refuse the concept of micro-utopias or self-gratification. They proved to be able to do politics because they constantly extend their influence and *empower* local actors. In some experiences, particularly the Cretan ones, it was possible to spot signs of a partial territorial self-management. The latter is in fact the goal of this mutual political commitment: to self-organise and self-govern their villages, towns, cities.

I argued that commoning is a powerful conceptualisation, yet it lacks a clear, perceptible, horizon. What the political commitment adds is precisely a clarification on where the workers prefiguration intends to point. It provides coordinates. The analytical work I did was to reconstruct these coordinates from the words of the workers and observing their behaviours. It was thus possible to spot the convergence between the practices and desires of autogestión and the philosophy of Communalism. What these workers are trying to achieve is self-organisation and self-government of territories. Not all of them are entangled in this project. In fact, Greek autogestión seems the one possessing the most radical features and even the *possibility* to partially achieve this goal.

What is, then, this *reachable* horizon made of? By subtracting parts of their territory from the institutional control they aim at reconstructing forms of self-government. Ideally, this can be done by either occupying municipal bodies or by creating counter-structures of democratic decision-making and horizontal self-government. Only such an overturn could shift the arena of social conflict from Citizens vs. State to Municipalities vs. State. According to Bookchin (1993) this could potentially breed libertarian municipalism:

1) Libertarian municipalism aims at moving neighbourhoods, villages, towns and cities into a new political sphere existing in *contraposition* with the State and *not* behaving like his partner or crutch. We must consider the Nation State and the libertarian municipalism as mutually incompatible elements;
2) The goal of libertarian municipalism is an 'ecological' society towards a 'commune of the communes';
3) Libertarian municipalism implies the municipalisation of the economy. Not its nationalisation, nor its privatisation. The community must become able to make use of its own resources and share them according to confederalist criteria;

4) Another major objective of libertarian municipalism is to educate its citizens, or any human being, either proletarian, professionals, experts, etc. to make the human condition universal, not particular or provincial;
5) Confederalism is key for libertarian municipalism since cultural interdependence is much needed and economic isolation useless.

Libertarian municipalism is the pragmatic scenario of the Communalist philosophy. Still, its configuration is as open as an anarchist-influenced thought requires. The core element is the assembly, as much as it is for the workers' cooperatives. It exists in a juxtaposition with the state, yet it does not give up challenging vertical structures. The municipalisation of the economy is a target for experiences like the Integral Coop of Heraklion, who are trying to implement it with tangible successes. The process of education and universalisation can be compared to the radical un-learning and recuperation of horizontal praxes in autogestión. Confederalism is perhaps the most utopian element that requires strong and autonomous communities to be formed and functioning by themselves. If for the Kurdish in Rojava it became reality, it is undoubtedly too distant for any European or Latin American community, at least for this era. Still, the political commitment of these communities and the prefigurative power generate by autogestión can breed partial forms of Communalism within their societies.

These considerations are built on the analysis of the workers' experiences within their communities. What might be worth considering for a deeper understanding of this phenomenon is the point of view of the community actors. Another interesting perspective would be the one of those mayors that willingly 'opened' their assemblies and embraced ideas close to the anarchist ones. Especially considering the latter element, I was recurrently told by the workers that there is a lack of 'enlightened' mayors. Despite this, their endeavour for a politically committed community goes on.

Fetishising Autogestión?

When discussing autogestión and its prefigurative forms during a conference, the anthropologist Demet Dinler argued that if we stop fetishising these workplaces and instead put them under more severe scrutiny we could eventually reach beneficial outcomes both for the field of study and for the workers themselves. By analysing their limits, contradictions, and failures we would do them a favour.

The argument above is worthy of cautious considerations. This research was conceived in the light of what de Sousa Santos (2007) called the process of making 'visible the invisibles' and follows Holloway's (2010; 2014) emphasis on the need to valorise bottom-up groups that do not aim at taking the power. It can be argued that autogestión is a "weapon of the weak" (2008), and if we observe it from a standpoint of scholar-activists there is an evident need to theoretically make this weapon more efficient. These workers tangibly prove their strategies and tactics are fit for their context and useful for the times we are living. If we start criticising them, are we not doing a favour to capitalism and austerity advocates?

The answer could be framed along the lines of Gibson-Graham's (1997) suggestion to stop talking about neoliberalism. If we recognise and valorise these experiences without giving too much space to the forces oppressing them, we are also entitled to put them under severe scrutiny. This manuscript evidently privileges the creative, unprecedented, *positive* elements. Yet, throughout its pages, I identified in the relationship between self-managed workplaces and institutions the most critical aspect of these adventures. Moreover, I suggested Argentinian autogestión might be having more difficulties in dealing with this matter if compared to the more *anarchist* Greek approach. This critique does not explain it all, since we will necessarily have to consider the downturns, the discriminations, the limits of their ecological and technological approaches vis à vis a future leaning towards full automation. Especially considering the prefigurative scenario, hence a Communalist utopia, we stumble upon numerous bumps on the road. This last section concentrates on what the workers called the 'missing ecosystem' needed to make their experiences become resilient, diffused, influential. Yet, it just intends to open a discussion worth deepening with future investigations.

> Listen what I think. I think that it's very difficult for autonomous entities, on their own with their own resources, to develop and create something that would have bigger social impact [...]. You need these experiences to consolidate in an ecosystem that doesn't consist only of isolated entities that try to organise among themselves, but to have a support structure, to have communication channels, to have some kind of common appeal to society, the public ... What I just want to say is that in order to form a movement that could have a real effect on society, you need to create this kind of ecosystem. Maybe part of this ecosystem could be a friendly state, I don't know. But until now, in Greece, this hasn't happened. (Ilias, SynAllois)

The implication is that if municipalities are not given enough power from the central state, their ties with the government will always be too strong, their independence minimum and their

capacity to become alterities extremely reduced. On the contrary, municipalities whose door remain closed will prevent citizens from participating to the communal life. These mayors will invariably be more accountable to the state than to their citizens.

> In Greece you have to understand that the municipal level is not really strong enough, and the level of participation of the citizens in municipal affairs is very low. Very very low. It's a very centralised state, Greece … too much centralised. (Ilias, SynAllois)

As asserted before, social reproduction is not given. Some workers' collectives are trying to build positive relations with their municipalities, while others are openly challenging the ones who are deaf to their proposal and demands. A space of exploration could potentially emerge from the intersection between the rising tide of neo-municipalism and the destructive winds crossing Europe (and beyond) in these recent years. Autonomies have a better chance to reverberate more strongly and prosper longer either under protection or completely forgotten by those in charge of repressing them. Still, in the former case institutional shielding could negatively evolve into co-optation, while in the latter they will become visible as soon as they will keep expanding. This is the conundrum the workers in autogestión are facing with their communities once they begin provoking a rupture and attempting societal transformation. Even a partial form of libertarian municipalism could allow them to resist and expand by invading the town halls with horizontal practices, opening their doors and putting the community at the centre of the political map. Yet, this would require much more societal energy that then can gather today.

Another major difficulty the workers are dealing with when prefiguring an alternative kind of society consists of the intimate and relational contradictions still affecting them until today. According to the Communalist theory (Bookchin 2015), the other two pillars beside direct democracy (in the form of libertarian municipalism) are ecologism and feminism. The movement of autogestión is relentlessly debating on how to address these matters, and for the former the limits are mostly technological (for them) and ideological (for the community). For what concerns feminism, it is surely part of the integral approach of the workers, but they are forced to deal with a growing aggression and repression permeating their communities.

In fact, feminism and gender discrimination are another significant territory the workers in autogestión can reconceptualise through prefiguration and organisational praxes. Equality is sought at wage level (either with parity or with significant reductions in the gender pay gap) and

with the horizontal organisation of labour. The 'educated' form of decision-making in the assemblies does not necessarily imply gender equality issues are automatically undisclosed. Implicit forms of discrimination and undisputed patriarchal relations might be perpetrated both by salaried as well as by self-managed workers. Observations and interviews with workers in autogestión showed nonetheless that there is a ground for reconceptualisation on this crucial matter. The reason for this is the preliminary rejection of – in theory – all constituted categories happening when autogestión is accompanied by prefiguration. Once again, to "[p]refigure is to reject the centrism, hierarchy, and authority that come with representative politics by emphasizing the embodied practice of enacting horizontal relationships and forms of organization that strive to reflect the future society being sought" (Boggs 1977, p.363). Patriarchy is the dominant form of hierarchy and authority, and feminism is on the contrary a form of horizontal, egalitarian and educated relationship. The challenge for a feminist future within the self-managed context (and more importantly outside of it) is not an easy one and has only begun to be tackled directly as proven by the round table 'autogestión from a gender perspective' recently introduced during the VI Encuentro. Nevertheless, both at network level and individually for each experience, the debate has been launched and results might be hopefully expected to become visible soon.

> We are into this. Because the world of mutual economy and autogestión generates other kinds of possibilities and perhaps better possibilities for the full participation of women, something you rarely see in the private environment. […] we changed a lot, and we have women, as me, in charge of sectors of the factory, responsible for decisions and with other crucial administrative roles. The same happens with the administrative board. This was organised to enhance the participation of women inside this space. (Lenor, Textiles Pigüé, my translation)

Lenor acknowledges the efforts made in a WRC that is famous for its wall-painted motto "sin mujeres no hay revolución" (without women there is no revolution). Still, while explaining they are thinking about opening a kindergarten in the factory for those mothers who cannot count on family support, she also states that feminism is becoming visible in Textiles Pigüé but gender discrimination is harder to eradicate in the private family environment, as well as at community level. Lastly, as anticipated, the worldwide tendency of criticising and repressing feminist and LGBTQ+ struggles are on an alarming rise[58]. Autogestión is entitled to become a safe space for

[58] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/14/homophobic-and-transphobic-hate-crimes-surge-in-england-and-wales

both but, as a movement, needs a stronger positioning on these matters. A confrontation with society on these crucial matters can result in repressions or divisions but is nonetheless much needed.

A clear ecological positioning is perhaps the most difficult to take for the workers in autogestión. As observed, workers' self-management exists in a space of rupture *and* in a time of co-existence with capitalism. These workers must find a necessary compromise on legal and economic terms if they aim to breathe under the capitalist atmosphere. Such conciliation is considered dangerous by orthodox revolutionaries. Here the argument is clearly the opposite, and it has been fully illustrated that the workers' belief is "if we do not dare navigating the open veins of capitalism, we will not navigate at all". Still, the nature of the compromise they reached is fragile, unstable and dissimilar for each experience. Abandoning capitalist relations infers a fundamental refusal of modern human-nature relations, Bookchin argues (1983). A major contradiction for autogestión emerges at this stage, where this principle is embraced but financial restrictions rarely leave any energy to rethink the productive process in an environmental key (with some notable exceptions). Even further, these workers cannot propose any fundamental ecological overturn to their communities if they are not able to adhere to it themselves. On the contrary, the input could perhaps come *from* their communities, but the technological and financial dilemma – considering the extremely limited amount of funds they might invest on the matter – remains unsolved.

Seen from different viewpoints, the answer is almost regularly the same: for autogestión the smaller is the better. For instance, Apo Kinou proved to be effective when rethinking and implementing environmentalist projects of production, distribution and consumption. Their organic olive oil that rejects labels and market prices but abides by ecological standards, their 'alternative' mustard, their investment in traditional techniques all point towards a reconstruction of a beneficial relationship with the environment without sacrificing their economic necessities. Yet, Apo Kinou is a tiny group, and on this the comparison with the possibilities of huge plants in Argentina ceases to be reasonable. It could be argued that autogestión needs to stay small to preserve its potential, but a minute size would not allow them to have any remarkable impact except on tiny communities or neighbourhoods. This is what is happening in Crete, which has three major urban settlements of less than 200,000 people each and is constellated by many villages. We can perhaps dare say that autogestión requires decentralisation and much less urbanisation to

become more concrete and less utopian as a societal project. Nevertheless, we are living in a conglomerating world amassing people in megacities, of which Buenos Aires is an example. Therefore, we can assume that autogestión might be the path to follow for those remaining in the countryside – and on this we would need to investigate another emergent and exciting side of autogestión, namely the rural one (see for example Genuino Clandestino[59]). There we might find the *purest* and most radical forms of reconceptualization and prefiguration. But what is left, then, for most of the urban citizens of this world deprived of this utopia? What can be their ecological overturn if not expressed in the radical choice of coming back to the countryside? Argentinians seem confident in saying that autogestión is an *urban* practice, but their capacity of prefiguring clashes with technology, automation, ecologism. On these matters, they point to the state as the source of possible solutions. And this is precisely the reason why their autogestión might risk falling back in line.

The integral approach, the reconstruction of broken bonds, the capacity of commoning and the political commitment are not sufficient to generate an 'ecosystem' expanding into the ruptures and provoking substantial change on the matters of direct democracy, ecologism and feminism. Inherent signs of an integral revolution, as the one of Rojava, can only be seen within the walls of these workplaces or, to a very low extent, amidst some of their communities. Communalism is debated among the workers in autogestión but quite often discarded as a wild utopia.

Despite this, its principles – whether knowingly or not – are embraced and replicated within this movement, while the society surrounding them is involved in practices of reconceptualization of the common goods and re-composition of distant struggles as much as these workers are. The final reflection is hence on the plausible inevitability of a communalist horizon for the movement of autogestión, notwithstanding all the difficulties considered above. The overarching question of the chapter was, in fact: what kind of society these workers are hoping to shape? This journey brought to one possible synthesis where all their different stances co-exist, and every multidirectional flow converge. Communalism is not an ideology but rather an open-ended trajectory, the liminal prefigurative point constantly redefined by the common will, and for the common good. If along their anticipatory road these workers will be about to fall from the razor edge they walk upon, a

[59] http://genuinoclandestino.it/

communalist horizon could provide them the coordinates they need to persevere in the Zapatista "asking, we walk". Because, in the end, these coordinates are the ones they were able to prefigure by themselves, and Communalism can be the most concrete synthesis of their utopias. I argue, in the end, that recognising their open Communalist trajectory would be beneficial also to address the many burdens weighting their complex yet hopeful journeys.

> The debate on the meaning of autogestión makes us reflect on utopias and ideologies. We realised that talking about autogestión and capitalism, or autogestión and the State, is a contradiction. These are concepts that do not get along well, because capitalism will always turn to the same criteria of profit and the State will invariably function to preserve a class society in favour of the rich. As such, these are necessarily in contradiction to whichever interpretation of autogestión. [...] But there can be forms, at municipal levels, or in different kinds of territories, where a social effort could realise an alternative out of the hegemonic system. History is real, and it shows us that there were moments and places where tangible experiences of autogestión succeeded in taking the commons goods in their hands. (Notes from the panel discussion 'Let's recuperate the public as a right to life, towards a self-managed economy' prepared by Angél, UGT, III Euromediterranean, my translation).
>
> Against this destructive moment of capitalism, we can be a sounding board of resistance, and a place of reflection and reconstruction (Ruggeri, III Euromediterranean, my translation).

Conclusions and Future Work

The title given to this dissertation is 'Workers Out of Control'. These workers' experiences, as stated, have been interpreted in the key of praxis-driven anarchism. Anarchist conceptualisations have constantly been misrepresented through the last decades, up to the point where anarchism is commonly depicted as the contrary of organisation and the nemesis of democracy (Reedy 2014).

These workers were provocatively introduced as 'out of control' to trigger an image of chaos, then to defy it and explain that, in fact, 'without control' workers are much better off. Control is synonym of top-down power, while indeed these workers are not deprived of power, but they reassign new meaning to the notion. It is no longer control, it becomes shared power, laid down horizontally, redistributed by everyone to everyone, even to the community that merges with the workplace, in a whole process of reconceptualisation of labour, relations and life altogether.

As in the story of the citizens of Pigüé that were initially standing with their deck chairs outside the factory during the eviction, but radically changed their minds and became supportive once they realised the resisting workers could take care of themselves. Taking care as in loving each other and becoming so entangled with their experience and collective life to care for it as well, as they had never done before. As much as they care for it, they will do anything to defend their autonomy from the institutions wanting to rip it off from them. These are the workers out of control.

Workers out of control also offers an interpretative key. Across literature, experiences similar in nature to the ones here presented tended to be classified under two major categories, namely 'Workers' control' and 'Workers' Self-Management' (Dolgoff 1974). The scholars who privilege the former, put the accent on what distinguishes the ownership of these workers compared to the salaried ones, thus their possession of the means of productions. Whether by seizing them from a previous owner or by initial agreement when establishing a venture, these workers control their machines, thus their capital. For Marxist understanding this is central, yet it is not comprehensive enough to describe, here, the distinctive nature of these human organisations.

Workers' self-management is instead a category capable of going beyond the simple who-controls-what definition, embracing other aspects beside the economic one. Self-management implies a kind of organisation where decisions are, in some form, shared. It contains both a negation – implying there is no power above the self – and an affirmation – that the self manages the self.

Autogestión, the Spanish translation for self-management, comes closer to describing what is at stake here. The reason, as explained, is that *gestión* is not a linguistic equivalent of *management*. I describe what these workers do using a word coming from the workers themselves. Further, when labelling their activities, they prefer to use a term that comprises affective, social, political *and* economic categories. Hence, autogestión.

If autogestión is the preferred definition of the common actions of these organisational subjects, then why and how these workers become 'out of control'?

Firstly, because 'out of control' entails a fundamental question behind this investigation. Trying to capture their innovative potential means understanding how independent these subjects are when performing their activities and prefiguring their politics. While the question behind the concept of 'Workers' Control' might be "what do these workers control?", here the perspective is turned upside down, thus the question becomes "what controls these workers?". Being embedded in a neoliberal framework, they need to learn how to "navigate the open veins of capitalism" (Dinerstein 2015). Yet, the centre of the attention is not on what the workers *add* – their control over machineries – but rather on what they aim to *subtract* – themselves from the control of institutions, market forces, austerity programs, etc.

Secondly, because 'out of control' implies a methodological positioning. I chose to follow a path leading to the theoretical disaggregation and reaggregation of structures and categories. This journey began from a radical constructivist standpoint, passing by the un-learning process suggested by Motta (2011) and the reconstruction of a new subjectivity as proposed by Holloway (2016). The arrival point was an ethnographical understanding of these subjects that does not aim for truth or certainties, but rather suggests an open ending. I imagined this theoretical route running in parallel with the praxes of these workers. In fact, their adventure begins with a negation, a deconstruction of both austerity and its *unavoidable* consequences. Then it passes through a reconceptualization of them as subjects, recognising their capacities and exploring their

possibilities. Their configuration, horizontal, democratic and freedom-driven is necessarily open-ended, being centred upon the relentless and unpredictable decision-making process of the assembly. Their future is not written, they have not decided it yet. As such, their projects might sound too vague or not grounded enough for the institutional left. Despite this, them being out of control – hence without a pre-determined direction – is exactly what fuels their hopes.

Thirdly, because this investigation was conceived as a co-production of the workers and the researcher, even if it is only the latter who takes full responsibility for the words written on these pages. Still, having recognised the necessity of breaking the boundary between praxes and theorisations, or between 'experts' and 'doers', we can joyfully become entitled to analysing phenomena *together*. Workers 'out of control' was theorised by the workers themselves. For instance, one of the most prominent recuperated factories of Argentina, the former Ceramica Zanón, renamed itself FaSinPat – Fabrica Sin Patrones. Translated, this stands for "Factory Without Owners". Here the category of owners is not limited to physical persons controlling them, but extends to institutions, financial groups, markets, etc, up to the very idea of 'ownership'. They emphasised the *subtractive* aspect. The 'without' particle symbolises their political desire to break the ties with whatever stands above them, and instead beginning a journey to seek alliances with whoever wants to sit at their horizontal table.

Similarly, anarchism comes from the Greek A(n)-narchos (ἀναρχία: ἀν + ἀρχή), where the particle 'a' is negative, and implies absence. 'Narchos' means government, or order. Anarchism is a libertarian approach to human societies focussing on what is *missing* compared to other (oppressed) societies. Yet, there is no definite program for anarchism: what will happen when a ruled society eventually becomes anarchist is not known to its participants, because for the very nature of this approach the people will have to decide what they want for themselves, and this can be different depending on context, histories, environment, cultures, etc.

I found amid self-managed workers the same tension towards emancipation and liberation *from* something. And, likewise, what would happen when they got rid of the owner, or when they decided to form an un-controlled collective, was not planned beforehand. It was for each of them a process of trial and error with experimental and creative practices. Their best inspirational resource were others who preceded them, yet the goal was seldom a mere repetition. Every single one of the actors here considered applied different practical solutions after having embraced self-

management theoretically. None of their choices are immediately comparable, yet all of them share substantial organisational elements and seem to prefigure a common political horizon.

Their common feature was to be, willingly, without bosses. Just to begin with. Therefore, to start this research I had to highlight this *negative* predisposition. They are without something, and, contrary to the common perception, they are quite better this way. Hence: 'workers out of control'. To defy the fears and the anxieties, and perhaps even to convince that not only workers, but people al large could at least question the reasons why we easily tend to accept the control of someone else's over ourselves.

My interpretation of the autogestión phenomenon was also a philosophical and methodological attempt to refuse traditional orthodoxies. Too often these realities are reduced to micro-ventures of utopian romanticisms who are uneducated in terms of class-consciousness. Likewise, the Anarchist tradition of the 20th century was so driven by the destructive impulse towards the state to accuse of betrayal any tangible experience who would intelligently seek compromises with the existing institutions. Bookchin's perspective (1983) guided this research experience with his anti-orthodox approach, embracing different schools, from the Frankfurt to the anarchist, but rejecting "their followers who often turned their ever-evolving ideas into rigid, sectarian doctrines" (p.66). Pragmatism, rather than theoretical orthodoxy, was the main driver of this investigation. In the same spirit, I tried to avoid being discipline confined. This research benefits from the intellectual treasures of anthropology, organisational studies, labour studies, history, and so forth.

Another attempt made throughout this research was to keep a correspondence between the ethics of the workers and the integrity of this investigation. For instance, if the question of feminism is appropriately reputed fundamental when workers talk about their prefigurative stance, feminism should also constitute a criterion of research. This implied reasoning upon how an investigation on this subject risk to be built upon male-dominated theories and writings; and what kind of contribute contemporary feminist studies are providing. Another example could be on mutualism and solidarity. While the direct purpose of this dissertation is to complete a Ph.D., it would have been un-ethical not to consider how these collected and analysed materials could serve the workers themselves. There is a personal implication in wanting to bring these writings back to their source. In fact, studying and comprehending the praxes of autogestión as scholar-activist brings to an abrupt, almost unexpected, dissolution of the separation between the intellectual effort and the

everyday life. Self-examination is therefore necessary to comprehend processes that are not limited to some scattered and supposedly important workplace. Instead, the radical conceptualisation of autogestión is life-invading, and asks for coherency and comprehension of its epistemology for a wary everyday use.

These beliefs grew from the moment I got in touch with a range of actors between Greece and Argentina and began questioning them about their supposed alterity. I had the chance to participate in their meetings and get to know many of them personally. After five years of study and multiple interactions I realised it sounded reasonable to attempt drawing general conclusions from contextualised experiences, in line with the Extended Case Method. Throughout the paper I proposed three analytical concepts that, according to what I was able to gather and deduce, characterise the contemporary 'movement of autogestión', as I have interpreted it.

The first was that of recuperations, identifying in their capacity of digging into their histories and discovering geographical marginalities to recover abilities, strategies, skills, and eventually a fascinating autonomous slant. I see the latter to be fit for the kind of creative resistance we need in these times. The second insisted on extra-local interactions and knowledge transfers. I named reverberations those tangible sound waves leaving social movements, occupying the imaginary of workplaces, and interestingly coming back to their communities. The third analytical contribution rotated around the philosophy of Communalism. I dared affirming that the prefigurative horizon of autogestión converges with the Communalist utopia. The tangible efforts of realising a community out of their experiences shows inherent signs of a broader social transformation in action, in spite of its incompleteness. Yet, different experiences have incomparable wishes, and in the end, I deemed highlighting those endeavours that seemed more faithful to the original desire of autonomy important. I reached these conclusions from a praxis-driven anarchist perspective, hence focussing on where their wildest efforts might lead to if they have a chance to flourish.

I believe the contribution this analysis offers to this field of study is not limited to these conclusions. From the beginning, I claimed the theoretical approach and the methodology I proposed offered substantially different interpretative keys while benefitting and being respectful of the work conducted before. From a praxis-driven anarchist epistemology, in particular, we gain an innovative perspective that is potentially re-applicable in disparate fields of study.

Scholars rooted in the Marxist tradition, especially when non-dogmatical, are capable of recognising subversive tactics and radical actors, but often fail to highlight their liberatory potential, their inherent revolutions, their capacity of questioning power. They seem to be trapped in a contradiction: their heart values these experiences, their mind wants to see them fail to prove the revolution should take place in another form and way. Those among them that can truly appreciate 'hope' are nonetheless stretching Marxism to its limits to still be able to encapsulate these experiences under its categories.

On the other side of the ring, we have a bunch of authors and writers that are often labelled as naïve by cynical Foucaultians, hardcore Zizekians, or admirers of Hardt and Negri and their autonomous-but-inflexible classifications. Among the targets, we can surely list Holloway, Zibechi and de Sousa Santos. Anything that has to do with utopias, dreams, love and the sudden renaissance of the marginalised is quickly dismissed as if these writers had no clue of the terrible, obscure and frightening times we live in. It must be admitted, though, that these scholars accused of 'hippie globalism' can sometime fail to provide radical answers, as their hopeful conceptualisation does not point towards a clear political horizon.

The first group might as well recognise that when they move that far from Marxism, they are already stepping into anarchist territories. The second group, for their part, should consider the rich treasure of the libertarian school of thought, that, in fact, offers that one political horizon they need to strengthen their proposals. Yet, both seem to fear the word 'anarchism', as indeed the common knowledge reminds us every day.

With praxes-driven anarchism I decided to distinguish within the literature and among the workers all the conceptualisations, the behaviours and the strategies that are intrinsically anarchist. David Graeber wrote in 2009 a fascinating piece titled "Are you an anarchist? The answer may surprise you!"[60] where he was arguing that a large part of our actions, of our everyday routine and choices, is made of *anarchist* interpretations of the reality, whether knowingly or not. The workers in self-management at the centre of this study are aware of their capacities and conscious of their political desires. For this reason, they often avoid labelling them. They correctly opt to keep the focus on

[60] https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/david-graeber-are-you-an-anarchist-the-answer-may-surprise-you

praxes and dodge all the merely theoretical discussions that might bring to their dissolution. Nonetheless, when observing and analysing their actions, we see anarchist attitudes. When considering their horizon, we see freedom.

I proposed the lens of praxis-driven anarchism as a convergent point between open-Marxists and dreamy idealists, but more importantly because I saw its potential for this context of study since the workers themselves indicated to follow this direction with their praxes. And even by openly saying the word, anarchism, I still think this theorisation should not be unhooked from the praxes. This lens is conceived for spotting and valorising tangible elements that are often unseen, but that regardless of their origin and substance, point towards a profound reconceptualisation on the matter of power in our society.

Among the phenomena I could observe with these glasses, the link between autogestión, prefiguration and autonomy was of utmost interest. For instance, autogestión has been rigorously analysed by Vieta, as much as prefiguration is becoming a fascinatingly widespread conceptualisation thanks to the efforts of Dinerstein, Motta, Maecklebergh and others. I suggested to combine the two, since what I could see among the workers was a prefigurative potential *overflowing* from their self-management. Furthermore, I added autonomy as a crucial element they strive for, they recuperate, and that is now part of their DNA. The three elements combined offer us a picture of autogestión as a radical political proposal with a clear horizon. While single pieces had been observed before, the lens I decided to use can spot these converging trajectories.

Another fundamental element emerging from these words is the notion of reverberations. I believe the potential of this conceptualisation is still largely unexplored. For instance, recuperations and Communalism both have to do specifically with the experience of these self-managed workers. Recuperations is an interesting attitude towards the past to remake its pieces in the present. Communalism is a powerful philosophy, but in this context, it is mainly seen for its conjunction with the political hopes of autogestión. Reverberations, on the other hand, is a malleable interpretative key potentially applicable in other scenarios. As much as praxis-driven anarchism, it indicates a missing level in the current analyses.

Reverberations are described in thousands of ways yet rarely identified as such, across the literature. They are called influences, or interactions, diffusion, knowledge transfer, and other

variables. They are often seen as contextual, complementary, results of and not causes for. The interpretative lens I adopted could see them fill the air with their constant movement and their relentless mutations. Hence, I opted to valorise them and describe them as pivotal immaterial elements that have tangible effects on our societies and our thoughts. The impact the Zapatistas had on our political imaginary would be minimal without the reverberations they were able to generate, and others to listen and reinvigorate. The significance of these experiences of autogestión is likewise regularly belittled because this analytical level is missing, and deprived of it they appear lonely, scattered, desperately trying to breathe under capitalism. Yet, the reverberations they produce onto society and between one another are in fact impressive. And despite how much interpretations differ on this, it is impossible not to recognise how a movement with similar ideals of organisations, relationships and mutualism spread from Argentina to New York, from Spain to Greece, and from the *asambleas vecinales* to the workers of Crete. These are all people that did not simply decide to replicate a strategy because they liked it, but instead they are the proof of how deeply we listen and embrace reverberations of other and distant worlds, and at what impressive level they become the drivers of our existence. For these reasons, I argue reverberations are a contribution with an unexpressed analytical potential, and worth considering beyond this research.

Hundreds of workers'-controlled experiences failed throughout the last decades, whilst several others compromised at a level that made them lose the ethico-political nature of their creation. Even amid the best performers, none of them is entirely safe from the control above their heads. It can be argued that these workers never truly achieve autonomy, or given that their autogestión is at its best only partially functioning, projecting their trajectories onto the horizon is a fetishisation. Yet, what is being observed throughout this investigation must not be misinterpreted: it is a movement, not an object.

These subjects in motion deal with an infinite range of difficulties, and as in all human experiences their trajectories are everything but linear. None of the observed paths ends up in a new universe where autonomy is achieved, but all of them quite certainly manage to 'break the veil' of control. To state these workers are out of control means thus to insist on focusing on just a section of their trajectories, the segment above the veil. What happens down below, the contradictions and downturns, is surely worth discussing, but is not the focus of this study. Because what lies above,

where emancipation becomes even slightly tangible, reverberations can be heard distinctively, and traces of Communalism or integral revolution can be found, is enormously interesting from an analytical, historical, activist perspective.

However, a future or further investigation should necessarily consider several aspects left aside. As mentioned, the 'dark side' of autogestión deserves a better understanding that might be not detrimental but beneficial to these and other experiences. Beyond this, there is a need to deepen the study of rural forms of self-management emerging across Europe, perhaps replicating in this continent what Dinerstein (2015) did for Latin America with her investigation on the 'art of organising hope'. Along these lines, other actors that are not necessarily workplaces are worth of consideration. Yet, many studies tend to be overinclusive and recognise alterities in any form of alternative configuration. This must be avoided and the focus on what autogestión implies kept relevant. Beside the experiences in Argentina and Greece, it would be worth broadening the understanding of the 'movement of autogestión' and its reverberations by including experiences of self-management from Italy, France, Croatia, Uruguay, Chile (just to mention a few that already take part in the meetings), if not beyond, extending to Asian and African countries. Another layer of investigation that this and other research projects might open is the perspective of the community and of the local municipalities vis à vis new workers' cooperatives. Lastly, autogestión was regarded as a public phenomenon, altering workplaces and communities. It would be fascinating to seek and dissect how people entangled in different forms of autogestión change their private habits and reconfigure their lives. In other words, to understand if autogestión generates a 'critical intimacy'. Whichever the direction might be, it would be better considering if such an investigational effort needs to strictly abide by the market logics of the academia – hence being conducted by a single person – or if it is about time to challenge this self-promoting attitude and begin to study and write collectively more often.

Above all, I believe efforts should be made to re-apply the concept of reverberations and the lens of praxis-driven anarchism for other stories, scenarios and environments. These two elements could offer us a 'creatively resistant' framework much needed for our times, and, given the possibility, I would personally love to commit to another study that could benefit from the application of a combination of these two.

Finally, we could wonder why we need to invest any other energy in researching autogestión and subjects out of control. If one last metaphor is conceded, astrophysicists searching for extra-terrestrial life in the vastity of the universe analyse data from any kind of exoplanet they stumble upon. Nevertheless, the utmost attention is dedicated to the study of Earth analogues, for their unique characteristic: these have an infinitesimal probability to host life. They invest full research energy on these, no matter how tiny the possibility might be.

Confronting this with the issue of human organisations, from a workplace perspective, in turbulent times of turbo-capitalism, hyper neo-liberalism, and nightmarish technological dystopias, we should perhaps have the philosophical goal of seeking liberation from all the above. As in the search of life in the universe, we could then rationally prefer paying attention to all those 'planets', no matter how tiny, fragile, and precarious, that show some probability to carry forms of organisation that – even slightly – liberate the workers and society from insecurity, sufferance, inequality, and oppression.

> We have, after all, something to lose. (Syn Allois, Manifesto, my translation)

Annexes

Interviews guidelines for workplaces

- I introduced myself as a researcher and activist, explaining both the official and unofficial reasons for the interview, the PhD research being the former and a personal 'political' interest/involvement the latter;
- all the persons interviewed were informed of the possibility to opt for anonymity and asked to state when and if they preferred some information not to be recorded or disclosed to third parts;
- all the actors were informed that they will receive a copy of the final research writing and that their feedback will be considered;
- interviews were planned where possible to take place within the cooperative buildings and enough time was spent before and after the interview within such environment (i.e. with recurring visits);
- questions ranged from a self-definition of their co-op experience to a self-evaluation of their project and towards predictions of future outcomes;
- questions macro areas were then inclusive of, although not limited to:

1. relations with local institutions (especially municipalities);
2. relations with pairs;
3. relations with the social movements;
4. relations with their community-neighbourhood-city;
5. financial sustainability;
6. internal organisation;
7. their theoretical bases and political positioning;
8. the origins of their knowledge needed to start the co-op project;
9. their story;
10. knowledge or comments on Argentinian or Greek co-op movement;
11. predictions on the Greek or Argentinians new co-op movement future.

List of interviews conducted in chronological order

Structure:	*Not included*
Number (or no number and specification if not included in the final analysis)	Georgia Bekridaki
Name of the interviewee(s) (or X if not explicitly willing to be identifiable)	Responsible
Post (posts are not fully explanatory due to rotation and horizontality)	Solidarity 4 All Greece
Place of work	Athens, Greece
City and country	2/7/2016
Date of the interview	
	(1)
	Stavroula
	Shopkeeper and responsible for the international relations
	Syn Allois

Athens, Greece
7/7/2016

Not included
Nikos
Head of the organisation
Welcommon (Anemos Ananeosis)
Athens, Greece
10/3/2017

Not included
Kira
Volunteer
Welcommon (Anemos Ananeosis)
Athens, Greece
10/3/2017

(2)
Ilias
Shopkeeper
Syn Allois
Athens, Greece
16-17/4/2017

(3)
Stavroula
Shopkeeper and responsible for the international relations
Syn Allois
Athens, Greece
16-17/4/2017

Not included
X
Member
Fair Trade Hellas
Athens, Greece
4/5/2017

(4)
Niovi
Bartender and shopkeeper
Lacandona
Athens, Greece
13/5/2017

Not included
Prof. Ioanna Sapfo Pepelasis
Associate Professor of Economics
Athens University, Greece
16/5/2017

(5)
Michalis
Cooperative member
Integral Cooperative of Heraklion
Heraklion, Crete, Greece
1/6/2017

(6)
X
Bartender and shopkeeper
Apo Kinou
Heraklion, Crete, Greece
1/6/2017

(7)
X
Cooperative member
Halikouti
Rethymno, Crete, Greece
3-4/6/2017

(8)
Y
Cooperative member
Halikouti
Rethymno, Crete, Greece
3-4/6/2017

(9)
X
Cooperative member
Tzepeto
Rethymno, Crete, Greece
4/6/2017

(10)
X
Shopkeeper
Terra Verde
Chania, Crete, Greece
6/6/2017

(11)
Y
Shopkeeper
Terra Verde
Chania, Crete, Greece
7/6/2017

(12)
Xristos M.
Worker
Vio Me
Thessaloniki, Greece
10/6/2017

Not included
X and Y
Shopkeepers
Bios.Coop
13/6/2017

Not included
X
Academic and activist
Thessaloniki, Greece
14/6/2017

Not included
X
Shopkeeper
Tienda Consumo Solidario Consol
Buenos Aires, Argentina
29/9/2017

(13)
Vaggelis
Worker
Vio Me
Interviewed during the VI Encuentro, Buenos Aires, Argentina
30/9/2017

(14)
Xristos P.
Worker
Vio Me
Interviewed during the VI Encuentro, Buenos Aires, Argentina
1/10/2017

(15)
Dimitra
Doctor
Vio Me Health Centre
Interviewed during the VI Encuentro, Buenos Aires, Argentina
2/10/2017

(16)
Lenor Litre
Relations with the community
Cooperativa de Trabajo Textiles Pigüé
Pigüé, Argentina
15/10/2017

(17)
Francisco 'Manteca' Martínez
Coordinator
Cooperativa de Trabajo Textiles Pigüé
Pigüé and Bahia Blanca, Argentina
16-18/10/2017

(18)
Leandro
Worker
Cooperativa de Trabajo Textiles Pigüé
Pigüé, Argenitina
17/10/2017

(19)
Pablo Peláez
Scholar for Facultad Abierta
Interwiewed at Documentation Centre in Chilavert
Buenos Aires, Argentina
3/11/2017

(20)
Silvia Diaz
Worker
La Cacerola
Buenos Aires, Argentina
23/11/2017

(21)
Andrés Ruggeri
Professor of Anthropology, Director of Facultad Abierta, University of Buenos Aires
Interviewed at La Cacerola
Buenos Aires, Argentina
11/12/2017

(22)
José Miguel Gomez
Activist
Home interview
Buenos Aires and Bahia Blanca, Argentina
15/11/2017 and 3/12/2017

(23)
Alioscia Castronovo
Anthropologist, Activist and scholar at Università di Roma La Sapienza and Universidad Nacional de San Martin, Member of COLABOR
Home interview
Buenos Aires, Argentina
20 and 22/11/2017

(24)
Gustavo
Printer
Cooperativa Chilavert Artes Gráficas
Buenos Aires, Argentina
4/12/2017

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To all the workers in Greece, Ευχαριστώ πολύ!

To all the workers in Argentina, muchísimas gracias! Siempre vencermos! (cit. Manteca)

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